



QUEENS OF  
BEAUTY . .

VOL I



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QUEENS OF  
BEAUTY . .

VOL. I







*From an engraving by J. H. Smith after a picture by Sir J. Kneller*

*Frances Jennings.  
Afterwards Duchess of Tyrconnel.*

# QUEENS OF BEAUTY

*AND THEIR ROMANCES*

BY

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WITH TWO PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES AND TWENTY-FOUR  
OTHER FULL-PAGE PORTRAITS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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*TO MY WIFE*





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## INTRODUCTORY

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DOROTHY OSBORNE, in one of her letters to Sir William Temple, says half pathetically, half satirically, "There is a beauty of youth that every one has once in their lives, and I remember my mother used to say that there was never anybody (that was not deformed) but was handsome to some reasonable degree once between fourteen and twenty." Even in her stingiest moods Nature has been kind to most women in this respect and has given them something, however brief and shadowy, upon which they can look back, with a sigh of regretful vanity, when their mirrors cease to flatter them or tell anything but the unpleasing truth. Every woman, therefore, I venture to think, is interested in the beauty of her sex, from the consciousness that she has at one time of her life possessed something of it, in however infinitesimal a degree. The plainest woman can recall moments when even critics of her own sex have declared that she "looked quite pretty." Indeed, for my own part, I decline to believe in the existence of an *ugly* woman. I have often found, even in faces which by the common verdict of both

sexes were pronounced hopelessly plain, some charm of expression—a sweetness of smile, a nobility of brow, a sympathetic eye, a sweeping curl of the lashes, a graceful curve of the nostril, a pretty pout of the lips, teeth white and regular as those of a fox-hound or a negro, a clear complexion, a wealth of hair, a satin skin, or what not—which has redeemed them from absolute plainness and shot across their features some gleam of beauty.

I know that physical beauty is often spoken of with disparagement—it is proverbially “skin deep,” evanescent, and associated with vanity, frivolity, and the flower that perishes. Such disparagement is the natural expression of envy on the part of those who are conscious that they are not beautiful, or not, at any rate, as beautiful as those whom they envy. But there is no getting over the fact that beauty is and has ever been woman’s most glorious gift, investing its possessors with a power and fascination against which even the wisest and sanest of men have not always been proof.

For man, of course, woman’s beauty is of perennial interest. When Boswell once mentioned to Dr. Johnson the case of a friend who had resolved never to marry a pretty woman, the wise old moralist promptly retorted : “ Sir, it is a very foolish resolution, to resolve not to marry a pretty woman. Beauty is of itself very estimable. No, sir, I would prefer a pretty woman, unless there are objections to her.

A pretty woman may be foolish : a pretty woman may be wicked : a pretty woman may not like me : but there is no such danger in marrying a pretty woman as is apprehended."

Beauty, therefore, has a stout advocate in Samuel Johnson, as sage and sound a philosopher as any to be met with in books.

Opinions differ, no doubt, as to what constitutes beauty. But there was not, I think, one of the women whose stories I have told in these pages who was not beautiful to more than one pair of eyes, and who did not owe her influence more or less to her personal charms. It has been my endeavour in each case to look for the romance that underlies bare biographical facts, and I have not looked in vain, for every beautiful woman has had *some* romance in her life.

The lives of the eight-and-twenty women whom I have selected cover a period of two hundred years, and afford a study both of woman-kind and of Society under a variety of conditions. I have tried to show how the gift of beauty affected the characters and the careers of its possessors—what use they made of their gift and what fate it brought them. Diverse, indeed, were both. But one immutable law Nature seems to have laid down—that a woman dowered with beauty must not expect happiness. I have also noted that *goodness*, of some sort, has seldom been wanting as an impressive and dominating feature in the characters of the greatest Queens of Beauty.



I am bound in candour to admit that some of the portraits here given fail to do justice to the charms of those whom they represent. I cannot, for example, believe for a moment that the artist who painted Lucy Hutchinson has left us a faithful presentment of the features or expression of that most attractive gentlewoman. Nor does the engraving of Sir Peter Lely's portrait of La Belle Hamilton convey an adequate idea of the grace and charm of the oil-painting or the loveliness of the original. All connoisseurs in art know how the mannerisms of seventeenth-century portrait-painters detract from the natural beauty of their subjects and spoil them by artificiality. And even some great portrait-painters of a later date are not free from similar blemishes. Where the portrait, then, does not bear out the description in the letter-press, it may be inferred that the discrepancy is due to the failure of the painter either in delineation or conception.

In some places I have, I daresay, laid myself open to the charge of being discursive. I can only plead that the discursiveness has supplied an element of amusement or interest which throws a not unilluminating side-light on the subject.

From letters I have quoted freely, because I take it, they, as a rule, afford the clearest revelation of the writer's character.

Certain classic passages I have given entire, because, though familiar to the superior and well-informed

person, they are probably known only by hearsay to the general and unencyclopædic reader for whom I cater.

Sundry celebrated beauties have been purposely omitted from these pages, for the reason that I have dealt with them, under a rather different aspect, elsewhere.

For the rest, whilst for some of my subjects I can only ask the tolerance allowed to old stories retold, there are others for which I may claim the interest due to freshness and novelty. I have gleaned "what strenuous gleaners may in the thronged fields" : and I hope that these *Queens of Beauty* may win at least such favour from the public as the kindly disposed are wont to grant to old friends with new faces.



# QUEENS OF BEAUTY

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## CHAPTER I

### A PURITAN WIFE

THOSE who have read Charles Kingsley's *Plays and Puritans* will remember how indignantly he combats the notion that there was no poetry or romance among the old Puritans, and what a delightful picture he gives of the stalwart young Roundhead trooper, Zeal-for-Truth Thoresby, of Thoresby Rise in Deeping Fen, coming back wounded from the wars to his home, with his heart full of tender thoughts for his sweetheart, the modest, pretty, shy but most lovable maiden, Patience. It is one of Kingsley's most charming prose idylls, and he thus sums up his argument at the close: "Poetry in those old Puritans! Why not? They were men of like passions with ourselves. They loved, they married, they brought up children: they feared, they sinned, they sorrowed, they fought—they conquered. There was poetry enough in them, be sure, though they

acted it like men, instead of singing it like birds." The story of Lucy Hutchinson's life is a signal illustration of Kingsley's point, for it is full of romantic interest, despite its sober Puritan colouring. And all Englishmen and Englishwomen owe her a debt of gratitude for having given us in her memoirs of her husband a picture of a noble Puritan gentleman which stands out, as one of our latest historians says, "with all the grace and tenderness of a portrait by Vandyck."

In the brief sketch she gives us of her early life, Lucy starts from the very beginning with a preciseness and minuteness of detail which has a simple, old-world charm about it.

"It was on the 29th of June," she writes, "in the year of our Lord 1619-20, that in the Tower of London, the principal city of the English isle, I was, about four of the clock in the morning, brought forth to behold the ensuing light. My father was Sir Allen Apsley, Lieutenant of the Tower of London: my mother, his third wife, was Lucy the youngest daughter of Sir John St. John, of Lidiard Treggoose in Wiltshire, by his second wife. My father had then living a son and a daughter by his former wives, and by my mother three sons, I being the eldest daughter. The land was then at peace (it being towards the latter end of the reign of King James), if that quietness may be called a peace which was rather like the calm and smooth surface

of the sea whose dark womb is impregnated with a horrid tempest."

Very proud of being an Englishwoman was Lucy, and not less proud of being an Apsley, for there had been Apsleys of Apsley before the Conquest. Her father, after a wild youth when he ruffled it with the gayest at the Court of Queen Bess, having lost all his money at gaming, went with the Earl of Essex on that expedition to Cadiz commemorated not long since in a stirring pageant at the Military Tournament. So gallant a soldier did he prove himself that he was subsequently employed on important service in Ireland, where he fell in love with a widow and married her. He was knighted by James I., and, on the death of his first wife, married another widow. His penchant for widows would have horrified the elder Mr. Weller, for on the decease of his second wife he fixed his affections upon yet a third widow, and was on the point of proposing to her when, a grizzled warrior of eight-and-forty, he met Lucy St. John, a lovely girl of sixteen, fell in love with her at first sight and married her. Mrs. Hutchinson naïvely remarks of her mother and aunts, "There were not in those days so many beautiful women found in any family as these; but my mother was by the most judgments preferred before all her elder sisters, who, something envious at it, used her unkindly." It is the old story of Cinderella in a Puritan setting, for sisters can be

jealous and unkind even though patterns of Christian piety.

A gloomy place one would have thought for a girl to be brought up in, that grim fortress-prison. But the Lieutenant's house was far from dull—it rang with the laughter of romping children—there were nine of them by the time Lucy entered her teens—and the father and mother were the sunniest and sweetest tempered of mortals. Lucy gives us charming sketches of both her parents. We can picture them vividly in our mind's eye. The kindly old soldier who was “a father to all his prisoners, sweetening with such compassionate kindness their restraint, that the infliction of a prison was not felt in his days”; whose purse was always open to any old comrade-in-arms who had fallen on evil days; delighting in innocent fun with his children, but severely intolerant of “the least immodest behaviour or dress in any woman under his roof”; generous and sympathetic with all manly and sensible young fellows, but hating above all things “an insignificant gallant that could only make his legs and prune himself and court a lady, but had not the brains to employ himself in things more suitable to a man's nobler sex.”

And not less charming is the companion picture of the comely young matron, with her sweet face and sunny smile, beloved by children and step-children alike, who was to all the prisoners that



MRS. LUCY HUTCHINSON.





came to the Tower as a mother. "If any were sick she made them broths and restoratives with her own hands, visited and took care of them and provided them all necessities ; if any were afflicted, comforted them, so that they felt not the inconvenience of a prison." It is pleasant to think that the last sad days of Walter Raleigh were cheered by this ministering angel, who out of her own purse defrayed the cost of his "rare experiments" in chemistry, "partly to comfort and divert the poor prisoner, and partly to gain the knowledge of his experiments and the medicine to help such poor people as were not able to seek physicians."

Not long before Lucy's birth, her mother, who was anxious to have a daughter to vary the monotony of sons, had a strange dream to which both she and her husband attached much significance. She dreamt that she was walking in a garden, when a star from heaven came down into her hand. They took this to mean that the child would be eminent, and when Lucy was born her rare and delicate beauty confirmed them in this belief. Much care and thought were spent over her education. At the age of four she could read English perfectly. At seven she had no less than eight tutors, and was most thoroughly instructed in languages—Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and French—music, dancing, and needlework. But she cared for nothing but books, and would slip away after meals "into some hole to read." "Playing

among other children," she frankly confesses, "I despised, and when I was forced to entertain such as came to visit me, I tired them with more grave instructions than their mothers, and plucked their babies to pieces and kept the children in such awe that they were glad when I entertained myself with elder company to which I was very acceptable." There you have the portrait of a precocious child drawn by herself, and it is not a pretty one. But then precocious children never are attractive except to their awe-stricken and admiring parents. Lucy Apsley, however, did not grow up into such a dreadful little prig as might have been expected. The human nature in her, if repressed in childhood, burst out in maidenhood. It is refreshing to read this candid admission: "I thought it no sin to learn or hear witty songs and amorous sonnets or poems, and twenty things of that kind, wherein I was so apt that I became the confidante in all the loves that were managed among my mother's young women, and there was none of them but had many lovers and some particular friends beloved above the rest."

Her father had been dead eight years, and, Lucy being now in her eighteenth year, her mother thought it was high time to think of marrying her, and with that end in view took her daughter down into Wiltshire to find a suitable match for her. There was something dreadfully prosaic about the business-like manner in which Lady Apsley set out to secure a

husband for her lovely girl, and Lucy's tranquil acquiescence in the arrangement. But romance was lurking in the background ready to spring a mine upon the match-making mother which should blow her well-laid schemes to the winds.

Just about this time, in the year 1637, there came up to London a young graduate of Peterhouse, Cambridge, who entered himself as a student for the Bar at Lincoln's Inn. His name was John Hutchinson, and he was the eldest son of Sir Thomas Hutchinson, of Owthorpe in the county of Notts, and of Lady Margaret, daughter of Sir John Byron of Newstead. Though a young man of grave deportment and serious views, John Hutchinson was a gallant and accomplished gentleman, who could hold his own in all manly and martial exercises and make himself agreeable to ladies. With a stepmother reigning over his father's house, he was glad to escape from it and enjoy the larger, freer life of London. He found the law, however, little to his taste, and, having a very handsome allowance from his father, betook himself to lighter studies in which there was more pleasure than profit. Music was his special delight; and as he possessed a good voice, with some skill upon the lute, both men and women, the latter especially, found him an acceptable companion. It is amusing to note with what gusto his wife, in her memoirs of her husband, dwells upon the attempts made to captivate him by various ladies. One was "a young maid very beautiful and

esteemed to be very rich, but of base parentage and penurious education." I think that our serious John must have given this young person some reason to imagine that he was not indifferent to her charms, for she appears to have been dreadfully cut up when she found that he had "meant nothing," and she incontinently married an earl's son out of pique. Then again, "in the same house there was a young gentlewoman of such admirable, tempting beauty and such excellent good-nature as would have thawed a block of ice, yet even she could never get an acquaintance with him. Wealth and beauty thus in vain tempted him, for it was not yet his time of love : but it was not far off."

His music-master persuaded him to come down to Richmond for the summer months and board with him. A friend of John's, on hearing of the proposal, "bade him take care of the place, for it was *so fatal for love*, that never any young disengaged person went thither who returned again free." I do not know whether Richmond still bears that reputation. But heart-whole young Hutchinson laughed at the warning and went gaily to meet his doom. The music-master's house was a resort of the "king's musicians," and in fact of all the musical enthusiasts in Richmond. The ladies quickly found out that this quiet, sensible young gentleman had good expectations and was consequently worth angling for. But they angled in vain.

Now, there was boarding in the house a little maid,

the youngest daughter of the deceased Sir Allen Apsley, who was perfecting herself in the mastery of the lute until the return of her mother and eldest sister from their marriage-hunt in Wiltshire. She was clever and vivacious, and, child though she was, John Hutchinson struck up a friendship with her. She had the keys of her mother's house, which was about half a mile distant, and went daily to open the windows and let air into the rooms. Sometimes she would ask John Hutchinson to accompany her. On one such occasion, as he was looking at "an odd byeshelf" in one of the rooms, he lit upon some Latin books. He asked whose they were. "My sister's," said the child. From that moment there came into John Hutchinson's heart a strange unaccountable longing to see the owner of those books. He grew so interested in this woman whom he had never seen that he drew out every one who knew her to talk about her, and the high praises he heard of her personal character and accomplishments "so much inflamed Mr. Hutchinson's desire of seeing her that he began to wonder at himself, that his heart, which had ever had so much indifferency for the most excellent of woman-kind, should have such strong impulses towards a stranger he had never seen : and certainly it was of the Lord (though he perceived it not) who had ordained him through so many various providences to be yoked with her in whom he found so much satisfaction."

It did not damp his ardour to be told that he need not hope for acquaintanceship with the lady, because "she shunned the converse of men as the plague and only lived in the enjoyment of herself, and had not the humanity to communicate that happiness to any of his sex." He simply said, "Well, but I *will* be acquainted with her." But there was a terrible blow in store for him. One day, when the boarders at the music-master's were at dinner, the arrival of Lady Apsley's foot-boy was announced. He brought the news that his mistress and her daughter might be expected in a few days. The women-folk at once assailed him with the question, "Is she married?" The foot-boy's reply was to produce some "bride laces," and, with a knowing smile, remark that he was bidden to tell no news but give them those tokens. The ladies took it for granted that Lucy was married, and clapped their hands with delight. But the tidings pierced the heart of poor John Hutchinson with a sudden pang of anguish. "Mr. Hutchinson immediately turned pale as ashes and felt a fainting to seize his spirits in that extraordinary manner that, finding himself ready to sink at table, he was fain to pretend something had offended his stomach and to retire from the table into the garden." His host, in great concern, followed him, and was so importunate in his inquiries after his health that to be rid of him the love-sick gentleman took refuge in his bed-chamber, and there laid himself down, a

prey to the most poignant grief. "Why," he thought, "should he be so concerned about an unknown person?" Was there, indeed, as his friend had warned him, some magic about the air of Richmond that acted like a love-philtre? All night he lay sleepless and distracted. The next day he sought out the foot-boy, and, having doubtless slipped a coin into his hand, questioned him as to what had really happened. Then, to his intense relief, he learned that the young lady was *not* married and that the foot-boy had merely been joking when he insinuated the contrary. There was still hope, then, for John.

At last he met his unknown enchantress at a great fête in Sion Garden. She had only just arrived from the country, and appeared among the company in her riding-dress. Did she answer the expectations which John had formed? Let her answer that question for him in her own quaint way. "She was not ugly in a careless riding-habit: she had a melancholy negligence both of herself and others as if she neither affected to please others nor took notice of anything before her: yet in spite of all her indifferency she was surprised with some unusual liking in her soul when she saw this gentleman who had hair, eyes, shape and countenance enough to beget love in any one at the first, and these set off with a graceful generous mien which promised an extraordinary person."



## Queens of Beauty

She noted approvingly with what quiet taste he was dressed, and what a gentleman he looked. The next day they met "*by accident*" (!), and John discovered to his joy that she was still disengaged ; "he found withal that though she was modest she was accostable, and willing to entertain his acquaintance." Then came the lover's daily visits, the long pleasant country walks "in that sweetest season of the spring" when, as we know on high poetic authority, "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." Not that Lucy had any such unmaidenly thoughts, but "though she innocently thought nothing of love, yet she was glad to have acquired such a friend." For six weeks they hovered on the borderland between friendship and courtship. Then the other ladies of Richmond, who had angled for John in vain, and the gentlemen, who had heretofore praised Lucy when she was absent, with one accord began to decry her to John's face, sneering at her dress and her blue-stockings ways. This roused Mr. Hutchinson's wrath, and he defended the lady with such spirit that they spitefully told him he had better marry her and then he would find out her true character. John regarded this as rather a happy thought, and promptly acted upon it. Then Lucy found that what she had been trying to make believe was friendship was really love after all. But she deemed her courtship too sacred a thing to be dwelt upon even to her own children. "I shall pass over all the little amorous relations," she says, "which

if I did take the pains to relate would make a true history of a more handsome management of love than the best romances describe : but these are to be forgotten as the vanities of youth, not worthy to be mentioned among the greater transactions of his life." Was there ever a woman who did not think her own love-story the most beautiful and romantic since Adam wooed Eve in the bowers of Eden? And does any man that has wooed and won a maid ever forget, even "among the greater transactions of his life," that sweet "vanity of his youth"?

But Fate had decreed that the cup of happiness should be dashed from the lips of these young lovers before they could taste it. On her wedding morn Lucy Apsley fell sick of the small-pox. Her life was despaired of, and even when the danger of death was passed "the disease made her the most deformed person that could be seen, for a great while after she had recovered." But John was as steadfast to his troth as the Duke of Wellington when, as Colonel Wellesley, he came back from India to find that the woman whom nine years before he had asked to be his wife was so disfigured by the same fell disease that he did not recognise her. "He married her as soon as she was able to quit her chamber, when the priest and all that saw her were affrighted to look upon her : but God recompensed his justice and constancy by restoring her, though she was longer than ordinary before she recovered, as well as she was before."

They were married on July 3rd, 1638, at St. Andrew's Church, Holborn. Such was the love-story of John Hutchinson and Lucy Apsley, as charming a one, I think, as ever was told.

It is unfortunate that there was no pen to give us as faithful and minute a portrait of Lucy Hutchinson as she has given us of her husband. With what loving tenderness she dwells upon his physical and mental graces, as after his death she takes up her pen to portray his life and character for her children ! The slender, well-knit figure of middle stature stands before us—we note the fair complexion, "the hair of light brown very thick-set in his youth, softer than the finest silk and curling into loose great rings at the ends" ; the eyes "of a lively grey," the teeth "even and white as the purest ivory," the long chin, the low forehead, the high-arched nose, the firm mouth. The inventory of his physical points is complete and exhaustive, and not less so is that of his moral virtues, the enumeration of which it must be confessed is more than a little wearisome. But there he stands for all time—the type and model of the best kind of English gentleman. For, if you come to think of it, our modern ideal of the perfect gentleman is the Puritan not the Cavalier type. The roystering, swaggering, swearing, loudly dressed gallant of the days of the second Charles would not be tolerated for a moment now in any decent society. He would be voted a rowdy and a cad. But the true Puritan

gentleman, such as John Hutchinson was, with his grave courtliness, his neat and quiet dress, his cultured tastes, his refined manliness, would he not be at home in the best company of twentieth-century gentlemen? Would he not be welcomed wherever there are men and women of good breeding and gentle manners? And no one can read Lucy Hutchinson's memoirs of her husband without feeling convinced that she was as true and charming a gentlewoman as he was a gallant and pure-hearted gentleman.

The early days of their married life were passed at Owthorpe, his father's place in Nottinghamshire, a fine roomy old English manor-house, with all the comforts and luxuries of a well-ordered English household. But they had been wedded only four years when the Civil War broke out. John Hutchinson, though loth at first to take any step that would bring him in conflict with "the Lord's anointed," had no doubt as to which side he should take when the time arrived to make his choice. It came to his ears that Lord Newark, then Lord-Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire, was about to seize the powder magazine of the county train-bands for the King. The time had come to act: Hutchinson gave the alarm, secured the powder magazine, and thus signally identified himself with the cause of the Parliament. His position as a country gentleman, the class to which Cromwell himself belonged and which he was always most anxious to conciliate, together with the aptitude which he had

already displayed for military enterprise, marked John Hutchinson out as a man qualified for an important command.

The rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in Pierrepont's regiment was conferred upon him, and then he was entrusted with the important post of Governor of Nottingham Town and Castle. It was of the utmost moment that a place so central should be in the hands of the Parliament. Colonel Hutchinson undertook to hold it against the Royalists, and on June 29th, 1643, entered upon his arduous duties. The fortifications were in a ruinous state, the garrison was weak and mutinous, the Committee, to whom the Governor was responsible, was composed of ignorant, narrow-minded bigots, of the snuffling, canting type of Puritan which has been so unjustly and so erroneously taken as the sole representative of Puritanism. Every member of the Committee was jealous and suspicious of his fellows, whilst all joined in doubting the Governor, whom they accused of sympathy with "the man of sin," because he would not adopt their peculiar dress and phraseology. "The godly of those days," writes Mrs. Hutchinson indignantly, "would not allow him to be religious because his hair was not in their cut nor his words in their phrases." It is amusing to note how warmly Mrs. Hutchinson repudiates the term "Roundhead" as applied to her husband, who, "having naturally a very fine thick-set head of hair, kept it clean and handsome so that it was a great ornament

to him." The crop-eared style she loathed as "ridiculous to behold," and I wonder what she would have thought of the closely clipped gentleman of to-day, to whom it has probably never occurred that he is a slavish copyist of the fashion set by "the crop-headed knaves of the Parliament," the ultra-Puritan section of the Cromwellians!

This pragmatcal Committee hampered the Governor in a hundred ways. They preached at him from the pulpit, they meddled with his orders to his men, they kept him so short of money that he was often at his wits' end to find food for the garrison, and twice they compelled him to go up to London to defend himself against their charges. The Presbyterians were his bitterest enemies, and even gentle Lucy Hutchinson's pen is dipped in gall when she writes of them. "They would," she says, "obstruct any good rather than that those they envied and hated should have the glory of procuring it." To a man of Colonel Hutchinson's high spirit this persecution and interference were galling, but he kept his temper, and by a tactful combination of firmness and patience had his way in the end. His defence of Nottingham Castle, which he gallantly held for the Parliament all through the Civil War, was a very notable achievement. And he was much helped in his labours by his brave and loyal wife, though if she could have had her way her husband would never have taken up arms at all, for she was a woman whose first thought was to

keep those whom she loved out of danger. For herself she feared nothing. Delicate in health though she was, she nobly took upon herself the duties of surgeon, tending the sick and wounded at all hours of the day and night, as true a ministering angel as her mother had been in those old days in the Tower of London. But even in this work of mercy she had fanatical prejudice to fight against. For she did not confine her sympathy and attention to the wounded of her own party, but extended them to the unfortunate Royalists who were taken prisoners. Here is a specimen of her experience on one occasion after the King's men had been beaten off in an assault on the Castle, and many of them captured.

“There was a large room, which was the chapel in the castle; this they had filled with prisoners, besides a very bad prison, which was no better than a dungeon, called the Lion's Den; and the new captain, Palmer, and a minister, having nothing else to do, walked up and down the castle yard insulting and beating the poor prisoners as they were brought up. In the encounter, one of the Derby men was slain, and five of our men hurt, who, for want of another surgeon, were brought to the governor's wife, and she, having some excellent balsams and plasters in her closet, with the assistance of a gentleman that had some skill, dressed their wounds—whereof some were dangerous, being all shots—with such success that they were all cured in convenient time. After

our wounded were dressed, as she stood at the chamber door, seeing three of the prisoners sorely cut, and carried bleeding to the Lion's Den, she desired the marshal to bring them to her, and dressed their wounds also ; which, while she was doing, Captain Palmer came in and told her he abhorred to see this favour to the enemies of God. She replied she had done nothing but what was her duty to them as fellow creatures, not as enemies. But he was very ill satisfied with her, and with the governor presently after."

And yet Captain Palmer no doubt believed himself to be a true disciple of the Master, the very keystone of whose teaching was the precept "Love your enemies ; do good to them that hate you" !

When the King fell into the hands of the Parliamentarians, Colonel Hutchinson, very much against his will, was put into the Commission for the trial of his Majesty, and was one of those who signed the death sentence. His wife defends his action on the ground that there was no other course to take with one who had proved so faithless to his word as Charles Stuart had. But if one reads between the lines I think one can discern that both wife and husband felt sharp compunctions and misgivings as to the part the latter had played in the act of regicide.

When the Civil War was over, Colonel Hutchinson returned to his estate at Owthorpe, which had suffered terribly at the hands of the "Malignants" whilst its



owner was holding Nottingham Castle. The house had to be almost rebuilt, and he spent £2,000 in adorning it with pictures and works of art. And here at last Lucy Hutchinson had a chance of living the life she loved. For they kept open house at Owthorpe, and it soon became a resort for the moderate men of both parties—men of sense and culture—who found in their charming hostess a woman fitted by intelligence and education to hold her own with the best of them—the worthy help-meet of the finest Puritan gentleman of his day. So in gardening and building, in music and reading, in sober conversation with congenial guests, in the society of his wife and in the education of his children, John Hutchinson found happy occupation for some years. To Lucy this was the one sweet oasis in the desert of a stormy and troubled life. She hated politics and strife, though when her husband was in the thick of them she entered, keenly enough, into all that interested him. He was far too honest and independent a man to work well with the Protector, though the latter did all in his power to keep on good terms with him. Mrs. Hutchinson thinks that Cromwell wanted to make a tool of her husband, and the Colonel, sharing this view, resented any advances from the Lord High Protector. Here is an instance of the attitude of stern, unbending rectitude which Colonel Hutchinson assumed.

“Soon after this, Lieutenant-General Cromwell

desired him to meet him one afternoon at a Committee, where a malicious accusation against the Governor of Hull was violently prosecuted by a fierce faction in that town. To this the governor had sent a very fair and honest defence ; yet most of the Committee, favouring the adverse faction, were labouring to cast out the governor. Colonel Hutchinson, though he knew him not, was very earnest in his defence, whereupon Cromwell drew him aside and asked what he meant by contending to keep in that governor [Overton]. The Colonel told him ‘because he saw nothing proved against him worthy of being ejected.’ ‘But,’ said Cromwell, ‘we like him not.’ ‘Then,’ said the Colonel, ‘do it upon that account, and blemish not a man that is innocent upon false accusations because you like him not.’ ‘But,’ said Cromwell, ‘we would have him out because the government is designed for you, and unless you put him out you cannot have the place.’ At this the Colonel was very angry, and told him if there was no way to bring him into their army but by casting out others unjustly, he would rather fall naked before his enemies than as such to put himself into a position of defence. Then returning to the table, he so eagerly undertook the injured governor’s protection that he foiled his enemies, and the governor was confirmed in his place.”

Clearly a man with such views was impracticable. In the government of nations honesty is no doubt

the best policy, but then political honesty should be reasonably flexible and tempered with tact—ultra-rigidity only produces friction. And, therefore, I do not think that it was altogether Cromwell's fault that he did not see eye to eye with Colonel Hutchinson.

But there came an end to that happy, halcyon life at Owthorpe when all the bells merrily rang in the Restoration. That was an anxious time for Lucy Hutchinson. There was her husband's name in that terrible death-warrant which had sent Charles Stuart to the scaffold, damning, incontrovertible evidence of Colonel Hutchinson's complicity in what all men now branded as a murder. How was her husband to be saved from the consequences of that fatal act? That was *her* one anxiety. As for *him*, he had no thought of seeking safety. To a man with his chivalrous, almost Quixotic, ideas of honour there was only one course open—to face the situation boldly. If he had done wrong he was ready to pay the penalty—no craven pleading for mercy or pardon should stain the name of John Hutchinson. He resolved to place himself in the hands of Parliament, declaring that “if the sacrifice of himself might conduce to public peace and settlement he would freely submit his life and fortunes to their disposal.” But his wife had no patience with Quixotry. Honour and chivalry were all very well, but with her they weighed as nothing in the balance against the life of the man she loved, the natural protector of herself and her children,

without whom the world would be a desert to her. I will let her tell the story of her own treachery to her husband, pardonable no doubt, laudable some may think it, but still treachery.

“Mrs. Hutchinson, whom to keep quiet her husband had hitherto persuaded that no man would lose or suffer by this change, at this beginning was awakened, and saw that he was ambitious of being a public sacrifice, and therefore herein only, in her whole life, resolved to disobey him, and improve all the affection he had to her for his safety, and prevailed with him to retire ; for she said she would not live to see him a prisoner. With her unquietness she drove him out of his own lodging into the custody of a friend, in order to his further retreat if occasion should be, and then made it her business to solicit all her friends for his safety. Meanwhile it was first resolved in the House that mercy should be shown to some, and exemplary justice to others ; then the number was defined and voted it should not exceed seven ; then, upon the king’s own solicitation that his subjects should be put out of their fears, those seven were named, and after that a proclamation was sent for the rest to come in. Colonel Hutchinson, not being one of these seven, was advised by his friends to surrender himself in order to secure his estate ; and he was very earnest to do it, when Mrs. Hutchinson would by no means hear of it ; but being exceedingly urged by his friends that she would hereby obsti-

nately lose all their estate, she would not yet consent that the Colonel should give himself into custody, and she had wrought him to a strong engagement that he would not dispose of himself without her. At length, being accused of obstinacy in not giving him up, she devised a way to try the House, and wrote in his name to the Speaker, to urge what might be done in his favour, and to let him know that, by reason of some inconveniency it might be to him, he desired not to come under custody, and yet should be ready to appear at their call ; and if they intended any mercy to him, he begged they would begin it in permitting him his liberty upon his parole till they should finally determine of him. This letter, she conceived, would try the temper of the House. If they granted this, she had her end, for he was still free ; if they denied, she might be satisfied in keeping him from surrendering himself.

“ Having contrived and written this letter, before she carried it to the Colonel a friend came to her out of the House, near which her lodgings then were, and told her that if they had but any ground to begin, the House was that day in a most excellent temper towards her husband ; whereupon she wrote her husband’s name to the letter and sent it in, being used sometimes to write the letters he dictated, and her characters not much differing from his. These gentlemen who were moved to try this opportunity were not the friends she relied on ; but God, to show

that it was He, not they, sent two common friends, who had such good success that the letter was well received; and upon that occasion all of all parties spoke so kindly and effectually for him, that he had not only what was desired, but was voted to be free, without any engagement; and his punishment was only that he should be discharged from the present Parliament, and from all offices, military or civil, in the State for ever; and upon his petition of thanks for this, his estate was also voted to be free from all mulcts and confiscations."

Had Colonel Hutchinson seen that letter, to which his wife had forged his name, before it was submitted to the House, he would without doubt have indignantly torn it into shreds. Whether he ever saw it afterwards seems uncertain, but it is still preserved, and a more abject confession of repentance it would be difficult to imagine. He, however, guessed that his wife and friends had procured his pardon by some means not quite consistent with his scrupulous notions of honour and self-respect. And he made no secret of his deep displeasure. His wife, who never seems to have realised that she had betrayed her husband's honour, writes in an injured tone: "She thought she had never deserved so well of him as in the endeavours and labours she exercised to bring him off, but never displeased him more in her life, and had much ado to persuade him to be contented with his own deliverance." When this brave, honourable, sensitive gentle-

man saw others, not more guilty than himself, suffering punishment and confiscation he felt mean. "He was not very satisfied in himself for accepting deliverance," writes his wife. "When he saw others suffer he suffered with them in his mind, and, had not his wife persuaded him, had offered himself a willing sacrifice : but being by her convinced that God's eminent appearance seemed to have sought him out for preservation, he with thanks acquiesced in that thing." Yet had he known to what a humiliating document his wife had forged his signature I doubt whether he would have been persuaded into believing that he owed his deliverance to a special interposition of Providence. It seems almost incredible that a woman of high principle and noble character should have been guilty of such falsehood and hypocrisy. But she has 'set it down herself in black and white, and she does not appear to have been troubled with the slightest shame or remorse for the grievous wrong she had done her husband. Even good women sometimes have no sense of "that chastity of honour which feels a stain like a wound." Lucy Hutchinson may have been such a woman, but I would rather think that it was her great love that blinded her, and surely the sternest moralist will not judge her harshly for that. "Her sin is forgiven, *for she loved much.*"

But when the opportunity for expiation came John Hutchinson seized upon it eagerly. He was arrested, about two years later, on a charge of com-

plicity in a plot against the King. There was no ground whatever for the charge. He was absolutely innocent of any knowledge of the so-called plot. But the Government seem to have repented of letting him get off so easily before, and, after suffering many indignities, which he resented at last with such spirit as ensured him respectful treatment thenceforward, he was lodged in the Tower. His wife was permitted to visit him there, but not to live with him. What memories must have crowded upon her as she contrasted these sad days with the happy ones which she had spent there in her childhood!

This time Colonel Hutchinson was determined that there should be no underhand intrigues to procure his release. He told his wife that "this captivity was the happiest release in the world to him," and strictly charged her "that she should not make applications to any person whatever, and made it his earnest request to Sir Allen Apsley (his brother-in-law) to let him stand or fall to his own innocence." Very reluctantly Mrs. Hutchinson submitted. Nevertheless her struggles to obtain a hearing for him, to ascertain of what he was accused, and to soften the pitiless secret tribunal at whose mercy he was, were endless; but she takes care to tell us that Colonel Hutchinson "sent his wife" on all these missions—she would not again do anything on her own responsibility.

He was condemned to be banished to the Isle of Man; but afterwards was sent off suddenly to Sandown



Castle in Kent, "a lamentable old ruined place—the rooms all out of repair and weather-free, no kind of accommodation for lodging or diet or any conveniency of life." The apartment in which he was confined "was a thoroughfare room that had five doors, and one of these opened on a platform that had nothing but the bleak air of the sea, which, every tide, washed the foot of the Castle walls." His wife followed him, hoping that she would here at least be permitted to live with him. But that comfort was refused her; so she and her son and daughter took lodgings in the town of Deal, whence they trudged every day on foot "to dinner and back again at night with horrible toil and inconvenience." Their happy family life, all broken up and come to nothing, was confined to these dreary pilgrimages by the edge of the sea and the prison table at which they sat together. Yet the Colonel "endured it so cheerfully that he was never more pleased and contented in his whole life." It was the exultation of a man conscious that there was no longer any stain upon his honour, that he was sharing the lot of suffering comrades, and that no one could reproach him with selfishly separating himself from them. Here is a picture of his prison life.

"When no other recreations were left him, he diverted himself with sorting and shadowing cockle-shells, which his wife and daughter gathered for him, with as much delight as he used to take in the richest

agates and onyxes he could compass with the most artificial engravings, which were things, when he recreated himself from serious studies, he as much delighted in as any form of art. But his fancy showed itself so excellent in sorting these shells that none of us could imitate it, and the cockles began to be admired by several persons that saw them. His wife bore all her own toils joyfully enough for the love of him, but could not but be very sad at the sight of his undeserved sufferings; and he would very sweetly and kindly chide her for it, and tell her that if she were but cheerful he should think this suffering the happiest thing that ever befell him. He would also bid her consider what reason she had to rejoice that the Lord supported him, and how much more intolerable it would have been if the Lord had suffered his spirits to sink, or his patience to have been lost under this. One day when she was weeping, after he had said many things to comfort her, he gave her his reasons why she should hope and be assured that this cause would revive, because the interest of God was so much involved in it that he was entitled to it. She told him she did not doubt the cause would revive; 'but,' said she, 'notwithstanding all your resolution, I know this will conquer the weakness of your constitution, and you will die in prison.' He replied, 'I think I shall not; but if I do, my blood will be innocent. I shall advance the cause more by my death, hastening the vengeance of God upon my unjust

enemies, than I will by all the actions of my life.' Another time, when she was telling him she feared they had but placed him on the sea-shore in order to transport him to Tangier, he told her that, if they did, God was the same God at Tangier as at Owthorpe; 'prithee,' said he, 'trust God with me—if He carry me away He will bring me back again.'"

As the month of August was drawing to a close Mrs. Hutchinson, who had decided to take a house at Deal for the winter, left Sandown and journeyed to Owthorpe to fetch her children and the necessary supplies. "She left with a very sad, ill-presaging heart," for she dreaded lest her husband might be shipped away to some barbarous place in her absence. The Colonel "comforted her all he could, and on the morning she went away said, 'Now, I myself begin to be loth to part with thee.' But yet, according to his usual cheerfulness, he encouraged himself with her and sent his son along with her." She had not been gone many days when he was attacked with fever, caused by the damp and unhealthy air of his prison. A little more than a week later the doctor, who had done all he could for him, broke to him the news that he had not long to live. He showed no emotion on hearing his death-sentence, but said calmly, "The will of the Lord be done. I am ready for it." To his wife he sent this as his last message, "Let her, as she is above other women, show herself

on this occasion a good Christian, and above the pitch of ordinary women." To his weeping daughter he turned and said, "Fie, Bab, do you mourn for me as one without hope? *there is hope, there is hope.*" Then, raising himself on the bed, he addressed the doctor with a smiling face. "And now, sir, I would fain know your reasons why you fancy me dying. I feel nothing in myself: my head is well, my heart is well, and I have no pain or sickness anywhere." The doctor could only reply, "Sir, I should be glad to be deceived." Then the Colonel sank back on the pillow, murmuring, "'Tis as I would have it—'tis as I would have it." He was instantly seized with convulsions and only spoke once again. Some one mentioned his wife's name. The dying man heard it, opened his eyes and with a deep sigh exclaimed, "Alas, but she will be surprised!" and with those words on his lips he died.

His body was removed at great expense to Owthorpe and buried there. A stately monument in the church, supposed to have been erected by Mrs. Hutchinson, records his many virtues. But he has a far better and more lasting monument in the beautiful and touching memoir in which his wife has embalmed his memory.

It seemed to her that she could not better fulfil his last injunction than by giving his children this portrait of their father. So she set to work soon after his death to write his life. "But that I am

under a command not to grieve at the common rate of desolate women, while I am studying which way to moderate my woe, and if it were possible to augment my love,—I can for the present find out none more just to your dear father and consolatory to myself than the preservation of his memory.”

That pious task fulfilled, Lucy Hutchinson effaces herself. We see and hear no more of her. The very date of her death is unknown. In her own words : “She was a very faithful mirror reflecting truly but dimly his own glories upon him so long as he was present : but when he was removed was only filled with a dark mist and never could again take in any delightful object nor return any shining representation. The greatest excellency she had was the power of apprehending and the virtue of loving his : so, as his shadow she waited on him everywhere, till he was taken into that region of light which admits of no shadow, and then she vanished into nothing.”

But it may be asked what claim has Lucy Hutchinson to the title of a “Queen of Beauty” ? My answer is that she has the highest claim, for the beauty of her person was enhanced and glorified by the beauty of her life and of her love. When Savonarola began his trenchant crusade against Fashion in Florence, he thundered out from his pulpit in the Duomo this tremendous indictment : “Ye women, who glory in your ornaments, in your head-dresses,

in your white hands, I tell you ye are all—UGLY.” He told them in words that burned into their souls that a woman’s beauty comes from within, not from without: that it is not chiselled features and languishing eyes, but the light from a pure heart shining in the face that makes a woman beautiful. *That* was the beauty which made Lucy Hutchinson a queen among women. I do not underrate the charm, the fascination, the compelling force of mere physical beauty. Nor do I narrow the ideal of good womanhood to the type of this sweet and pious Puritan. But I say that goodness of some sort has been a most potent factor in the sway of the *greatest* Queens of Beauty. For goodness has as wide a meaning as charm, and in its highest form is perhaps oftenest found unconfined by “Puritanic stays.” Indeed in my next chapter I shall show that a beautiful woman can combine wit and gaiety with the truest virtues of her sex amid surroundings which Lucy Hutchinson would have contemplated with horror, as utterly incompatible with honour and decency. To her the Court of the Restoration would have suggested nothing but hideous orgies of profligacy and devilishness. She could not have conceived it possible for any woman to retain the slightest shreds of chastity or rectitude in so tainted an atmosphere. How utterly mistaken and false is such a narrow and bigoted view of human life and human worth I shall bring many instances to prove, but none more remarkable and

significant than those of the two famous beauties of the Court of Charles II., who follow next in my gallery of Queens :

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,  
Another thing to fall.

## CHAPTER II

### A FAIR WOMAN WITH DISCRETION

“**L**ELY alone,” says Horace Walpole, “can excuse the gallantries of Charles : he painted an apology for that Asiatic Court.” Very pretty and bewitching are the faces that beam upon us from Sir Peter’s canvases at Hampton Court, but there is a self-consciousness about most of them, an impudent confidence in the irresistible attractions of the charms they so liberally display, a mien which, to use Steele’s phrase, “carries invitation” so wantonly that we feel our respect for womanhood lowered in their presence. Charming no doubt many of them were either by reason of their beauty or their wit, or both combined ; but the charm was meretricious, artificial, put on and taken off with their paint and fal-lals. In these simpering lips and languishing eyes I see the “bought smile . . . loveless, joyless, unendeared” which Milton sets in stern antithesis to the “domestic sweets” of “wedded love.” I feel as I look at them that these are they whom the great Puritan poet had in his mind’s eye as feigning a ghastly simulacrum of Love—

in court amours,  
Mixed dance, or wanton masque, or midnight ball,  
Or serenate, which the starved lover sings  
To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.



It is not my intention to dwell upon what are commonly known as "the frail beauties" who have conferred a scandalous celebrity on the court of the Merry Monarch. There is little or nothing to redeem the sordid vice of the lives of most of them. Some of the most beautiful were shameless, brazen-faced courtesans whom Charles himself despised whilst he good-naturedly tolerated and pensioned them. But, surprising as it may sound, there were actually women, beautiful and brilliant women, who passed through the Court of Charles II. without a stain upon their characters—women who were proof against all temptations, who, whilst attracting unbounded admiration, possessed the courage and virtue to keep their admirers at a respectful distance. A woman who could pass through such an ordeal unscathed is surely one who has special claim upon the admiration and respect of both sexes.

Such an one was Elizabeth Hamilton—La Belle Hamilton—who might have sat for the original of John Fletcher's portrait :

A woman of that rare behaviour,  
So qualified, that admiration  
Dwells round about her : of that perfect spirit,  
That admirable carriage,  
That sweetness in discourse—young as the morning,  
Her blushes staining her.

Young, beautiful, wise, witty and discreet "even to distraction's desperation," Elizabeth Hamilton seemed to have been placed in the Court of Charles II.



*From a mezzotint engraving by J. McArdell, after the picture by Sir Peter Lely.*

LA BELLE HAMILTON, COMTESSE DE GRAMMONT.



purposely to redeem the credit of her sex. She moved through that profligate sphere in an orbit of her own.

Her soul was like a star and dwelt apart :  
Pure as the naked heavens.

The eldest daughter of Sir George Hamilton, a soldier of distinction, Elizabeth was born in 1641, and at the age of nineteen was appointed Maid of Honour to the Queen. As every pretty woman about the Court was considered fair game, to be hunted down by the rakes whom Charles had gathered round him, there was a dead-set made at La Belle Hamilton the moment she appeared upon the scene. The mere fact of being a Maid of Honour was regarded as sufficient proof of a lady's complaisance, and virtue was the last thing a gallant expected to be confronted with in his more or less dishonourable suit. But La Belle Hamilton was an exception to the rule. First the King, then the Duke of York endeavoured to add the new Maid of Honour to the list of their mistresses. But in vain. With infinite tact and ready wit the girl checked their advances, till they gave up the hopeless chase in despair. Then a whole host of suitors whose intentions were "strictly honourable" (as soon as they found that the only way to La Belle Hamilton's affections was through the door of matrimony) besieged the new beauty. The Duke of Richmond ; Henry Jermyn, nephew to the Earl of St. Albans, and the deadliest lady-killer of his time ;

Henry Howard, brother of the Earl of Arundel and afterwards Duke of Norfolk ; Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnel, all offered her marriage, but she refused them all. And yet she managed to retain the admiration and respect of the suitors whom she rejected. If they could not aspire to her hand, they might at least still enjoy her fascinating society, laugh at her brilliant sallies of wit, gaze regretfully and yet adoringly on the charms which might never be theirs, and console themselves with the reflection that none of their rivals was more fortunate than themselves. Would no one ever tame that high spirit ? Would no one ever find a way to that flinty heart ? Apparently not : for Elizabeth continued happy and heartwhole, full of gaiety and high animal spirits, the leader in every diversion, the prime mover in every piece of fun and frolic, gamesome as a colt, and merry as a grasshopper.

In the year 1662 there came to the Court of Charles II. a gay and handsome young French adventurer, Philibert Comte de Grammont, who had been banished from France for making love to one of the King's mistresses, Mademoiselle de la Motte. He was a man of varied experience. He had lived a life of pleasure in France and Italy, had fought gallantly under Condé and Turenne, the greatest captains of the age, had been the hero of a thousand amours and adventures, and was altogether, to use an expressive Hibernicism, "a broth of a bhoys."

Charles took a fancy to him at once, and so did the then reigning favourite, Lady Castlemaine. De Grammont was soon at home in the English Court, making love to the ladies, ruffling it at cards and dice with the gentlemen, and fascinating every one by his wit and address. It was not, however, till he had been some time at Court that he made the acquaintance of La Belle Hamilton. He thus tells the story of their first meeting in the vivacious and entertaining Memoirs which he dictated in his old age to Elizabeth's brother, Anthony Hamilton.

“It had so happened that, of all the beautiful women at Court, this was the lady whom he had least seen, and whom he had heard most commended; this, therefore, was the first time that he had a close view of her, and he soon found that he had seen nothing at Court before this instant; he asked her some questions, to which she replied; as long as she was dancing, his eyes were fixed upon her. Miss Hamilton was at the happy age when the charms of the fair sex begin to bloom; she had the finest shape, the loveliest neck, and most beautiful arms in the world; she was majestic and graceful in all her movements; and she was the original which all the ladies copied in their taste and air of dress. Her forehead was open, white, and smooth; her hair was well set, and fell with ease into that natural order which it is so difficult to imitate. Her complexion was possessed of a certain freshness, not to be equalled by borrowed

colours ; her eyes were not large, but they were lively, and capable of expressing whatever she pleased. Her mouth was full of graces, and her contour uncommonly perfect ; nor was her nose, which was small, delicate, and turned up, the least ornament of so lovely a face. In fine, her air, her carriage, and the numberless graces dispersed over her whole person, made the Chevalier de Grammont not doubt but that she was possessed of every other qualification. Her mind was a proper companion for such a form ; she did not endeavour to shine in conversation by those sprightly sallies which only puzzle ; and with still greater care she avoided that affected solemnity in her discourse which produces stupidity ; but, without any eagerness to talk, she just said what she ought, and no more. She had an admirable discernment in distinguishing between solid and false wit ; and, far from making an ostentatious display of her abilities, she was reserved, though very just in her decisions : her sentiments were always noble, and even lofty to the highest extent, when there was occasion ; nevertheless, she was less prepossessed with her own merit than is usually the case with those who have so much. Formed as we have described, she could not fail of commanding love ; but so far was she from courting it, that she was scrupulously nice with respect to those whose merit might entitle them to form any pretensions to her."

The gay and debonair De Grammont thought to

win La Belle Hamilton by the arts which he had hitherto found successful in love. He made her presents of jewellery and gloves, but, to his chagrin, they were contemptuously returned. She threw his *billets doux* into the faces of his messengers or tore them up before his eyes without glancing at their contents. Not satisfied with this, she had the audacity to play a practical joke upon him which, as an example of her madcap spirit, I will relate.

There was a certain Lady Muskerry who was the butt of the Court. She was a great heiress, and her money-bags had attracted the covetous eyes of my Lord Muskerry—for other attractions she had none. Her figure was short, squat, and dumpy; her legs were dwarfed, and one was shorter than the other; her face was as plain as an Eskimo squaw's; she was fat and scant of breath,—yet the two things in which she most delighted were dress and dancing! She spent much time and money in clothing a figure which only looked the more grotesque the more finely it was dressed. She would dance till she dropped, if she could only find a partner, supremely unconscious of the fact that her Terpsichorean feats resembled those of a swan upon the ice. The Queen had given notice of her intention to hold a masked ball at which all the invited guests were to appear in fancy costumes, assigned to them by the Chamberlain, who also allotted them their partners. Lady Muskerry was dying for an invitation, but her husband was determined she should not have



one, as he had no mind to see his wife the laughing-stock of the whole Court. The Queen supported his views.

La Belle Hamilton, however, was inspired by the spirit of fun and mischief to play a joke upon poor Lady Muskerrey. That unhappy person was bemoaning her hard fate in being excluded from the masquerade, when her husband turned upon her and read her a sermon on her folly. "Madam," said he, "you are neither of the age nor figure to play a part in such an entertainment without making yourself ridiculous, and I expressly forbid you to join the masqueraders, even if you are invited : your place is among the spectators." Just then a note was brought to Lady Muskerrey. To her intense delight it proved to be an invitation from the Queen to take part in the masquerade, and a request that her ladyship would dress in the *Babylonian fashion*. All in a flutter, the deluded lady, who had not the remotest idea what the "Babylonian fashion" might be, hurried to the City and interviewed some Levant merchants whom she knew there, with the object of gaining some information about Babylonian costumes. But she could not gain much satisfactory information, so she went to the Maids of Honour asking each, "How do the ladies dress in Babylon?" No one knew, except La Belle Hamilton, who took Lady Muskerrey aside and gave her some valuable hints !

Now the King, knowing De Grammont's feelings

towards Miss Hamilton, had promised to assign him that lady as his partner in the masquerade if the count, on his part, would use his influence with La Belle Stewart on the King's behalf. Miss Stewart was a Court beauty to whom Charles was then very much attracted, and was one of the most beautiful women of her time. De Grammont stood high in her good graces, and hence the King's request.

But, as the count was hurrying to the masquerade, he was hailed by a lady from a coach window with :

"Comte de Grammont, come here. I am your partner. The Queen has ordered it. Take charge of me, I pray—escort me to the masquerade."

"You are under some mistake, madam."

"No, no. I have it here in the Queen's writing. You are my partner for the evening. You cannot disobey Her Majesty : I insist upon your doing your duty."

The count bowed, then hastily slipped behind the carriage, and, before the bewildered lady could see which way he had gone, was safely inside the palace. Meeting the King, De Grammont amused him by a good story he had to tell, and then breaking off, said :

"But, by the way, sire, I forgot to say that I have just been waylaid by a devil of a phantom in a masque who would have it that the Queen had ordered me to be her partner. She is lying out there ambushed in her coach, I expect, still waiting for me. By my faith, a wondrous sight she is ! She must have at

least sixty ells of gauze and silver tissue about her, not to mention a sort of pyramid upon her head, adorned with a hundred thousand baubles."

The Queen, who had overheard the count, stepped forward.

"But," said she, "all I have asked are here."

"I bet," said the King, "that it is Mad Madge" (the eccentric Duchess of Newcastle).

"And I," broke in Lord Muskerry, staring hard at Miss Hamilton, who stood close by, looking as demure and as innocent as a nun at confession, "will bet it is another fool, for I'm very much mistaken if it is not my wife."

"We'll have her in—we'll have her in," said Charles, laughing, whilst La Belle Hamilton looked silyly at De Grammont, whose dismay at the prospect before him was ludicrous.

"By all means, your Majesty," said Lord Muskerry hastily, "I will bring her in."

But his lordship, instead, bundled his wife home in her wonderful Babylonian costume, locked her in her room, and placed a sentry at the door to prevent any possibility of egress.

La Belle Hamilton's little joke, therefore, did not come off as she had intended. But I suppose she confessed herself the author of the trick to her partner, who must have made the running very strong that evening, for within a few days of the masquerade he was recognised as the accepted suitor of the beauti-

ful woman who had driven half the gallants of the Court to despair.

But the gay count seemed in no hurry to marry the woman he had won. He was suddenly recalled to Paris, and started off without even bidding adieu to his *fiancée*. He had got as far as Dover when he was overtaken by Miss Hamilton's two brothers George and Anthony. Quoth the former :

“Chevalier de Grammont, n'avez-vous rien oublié à Londres? ”

To which the Count, without the least embarrassment, coolly replied :

“Pardonnez-moi, messieurs ; j'ai oublié d'épouser votre sœur.”

And back to London the Count promptly came to rectify his little oversight by marrying the lady. It was from this comic incident that Molière took the central idea of his comedy *Le Mariage forcé*.

There is no record of what La Belle Hamilton said or felt at this strange conduct of her lover. If she had been as wise as she was witty it should have given her an insight into his character which might well have made her pause before chaining herself for life to a man so careless, so thoughtless, and so selfish. But she was apparently infatuated with his superficial *bonhomie* and gallantry, and she paid the penalty of her infatuation. Her life could scarcely have been a happy one with a husband who, though he treated her with punctilious courtesy, soon showed her that

he had no real affection to bestow upon her. What little heart he had was divided among a score of women, and La Belle Elizabeth could not even boast of having a larger share of it than any of her numerous rivals. He was an inveterate gambler and *bon-vivant*, and lived his life merrily. He was eighty when he bethought him of dictating his Memoirs to Anthony Hamilton, and I am disposed to forgive him much for the sake of those most racy and entertaining chronicles of love and adventure. We owe to him the most vivid picture we possess of the Court of Charles II., and his portraits of the men and women who "all by the King's example lived and loved" are particularly bright and clever.

To the last the gallant Count, with all his fourscore years, was devoted to pleasure, and when he shuffled off this mortal coil on January 10th, 1707, it was his boast that he had lived every hour of his life. His Countess did not long survive him. She died on January 3rd, 1708. As I look at Lely's portrait of her—one of the best he ever painted—and think of her wit, her beauty, and her virtue, I cannot but feel that Fate dealt hardly with her in mating her with such a *vaurien* as De Grammont. The woman who kept her fair fame unsullied in the midst of such a Court as that of Charles deserved a better husband.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM THE CASTLE TO THE CONVENT.

CONTEMPORARY with Elizabeth Hamilton, equally beautiful, and equally virtuous, was Frances Jennings, the elder sister of the more famous Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. Frances, at the early age of sixteen, was appointed one of the three Maids of Honour to the Duchess of York ; her two companions being Miss Temple and Arabella Churchill, sister of John, afterwards the great Duke of Marlborough. Miss Temple was a childish and conceited coquette who cared for nothing but flattery and sweetmeats, and was ready to surrender herself to any man who would keep her liberally supplied with either. Arabella Churchill, as every one knows, was the acknowledged mistress of the Duke of York. The Duke looked upon his wife's Maids of Honour as his own property ; and having found Miss Temple and Miss Churchill complaisant, fancied that he should gain an equally easy conquest over Miss Jennings, who was by far the most beautiful and attractive of the three. But young as she was—only sixteen, let it be remembered—Frances had already

mapped out her line of conduct. She had set down in writing the following maxims by which she meant to guide her actions,—that “a lady ought to be young to enter the Court with advantage and not old to leave it with a good grace ; that she could not maintain herself there but by a glorious resistance or by illustrious foibles ; and that, in so dangerous a situation, she ought to use her utmost endeavours not to dispose of her heart until she gave her hand.”

Here was a discreet young woman indeed ! and her discretion was all the more creditable to her because she owed none of it to her mother, who was a matron of the frisky order, on whom the yoke of matrimony rested so lightly that she was ready on very slight inducement to throw it off regardless of scandal. I think that pride was as strong a motive with Frances Jennings as virtue. The combination of the two made her path clear to her. “Illustrious foibles” were too common to gratify her ambition. Every woman at Court set that goal before her. “Glorious resistance” held out the prospect that squared more with her pride, and having once selected that as her line of action, she never swerved from it.

Her treatment of the amorous Duke afforded intense amusement to those who watched it. When he tried to ogle her, her eyes were always wandering elsewhere and *would not* meet his. If she did for a moment casually encounter his glance she was quite unconcerned. There was no blush or slightest sign of confusion to

show that she attached any meaning to his languishing looks. When he ventured to put his thoughts into speech the failure was still more signal. She would not take him seriously ; laughed in his face when he talked of settlements ; chaffed him when he got sentimental ; and when he sent her presents threw them aside with an air of scorn which was far more galling to his vanity than if she had returned them. Then he took to writing to her. The Comte de Grammont gives an amusing picture of the mode in which she treated this phase of the Royal Duke's passion.

“Every day billets containing the tenderest expressions and most magnificent promises were slipped into her pockets or into her muff. This, however, could not be done unperceived ; and the malicious little gipsy took care that those who saw them slip in should likewise see them fall out, unperused and unopened : she only shook her muff, or pulled out her handkerchief ; as soon as ever his back was turned his billets fell about her like hailstones, and whoever pleased might take them up.”

At last the baffled Duke had to admit that this “giddy girl” had beaten him. For the honour of the family, whose reputation for gallantry was at stake, the King then took up the running, “for he thought it unnatural that she should neither be tempted by promises nor gained by importunity.” She found Charles a very different lover from James. The former was gay and charming—the latter dull and stupid, and it is possible



that the elder and more fascinating brother might have succeeded where the younger failed, had not beleaguered virtue found an unexpected ally in the person of La Belle Stewart.

Miss Stewart, to whom I have already referred, was described by her contemporaries as a woman of "exquisite beauty," with "the loveliest face and most perfect figure ever seen."

Roettière, the King's engraver of the Mint, struck a medal of her in the character of Britannia, and the figure has remained upon our coinage ever since. Charles was madly in love with her, and at one time began to take steps for a divorce from his Queen with the serious intention of making Miss Stewart her successor as Queen Consort. But La Belle Stewart's secret marriage with the Duke of Richmond, brought about by Lord Clarendon, who had no mind to see her installed as Queen, knocked that project on the head. As a wife, however, the lady proved less inaccessible to royal favours than as a maid.

But, at the time when Charles was laying siege to Frances Jennings, La Belle Stewart was still unmarried, and it was her cue to encourage the King's passion. She would, therefore, brook no rival in the field, and she peremptorily bade her royal lover leave the Duke of York's Maids of Honour to their rightful master and attend to his own flock, giving him at the same time a significant hint that if he continued to pay attentions to Miss Jennings she would transfer her affection to

the Duke of Richmond, who was eager to marry her. So Charles, who had no stronger motive than pique in courting the girl who had spurned his brother, abruptly abandoned the pursuit, foiled, as every one not in the secret thought, by the stubborn and impregnable virtue of this chaste goddess, who guarded her charms with a prudery which was a marvel and an enigma to the Court.

“Thus,” says the Comte de Grammont, “she continued to triumph over the liberties of others without ever losing her own. Her hour was not yet come, but it was not far distant.”

Where a King and a Prince of the Blood had failed, less distinguished lovers naturally despaired of success.

And thus, as in the case of Elizabeth Hamilton, honourable suitors began to press to the front. For the prize seemed well worth any man’s winning. Here is De Grammont’s portrait of the lady to prove it.

“Miss Jennings, adorned with all the blooming treasures of youth, had the fairest and brightest complexion that ever was seen ; her hair was of a beauteous flaxen ; there was something particularly lively and animated in her countenance, which preserved her from that insipidity which is frequently an attendant on a complexion so extremely fair. Her mouth was not the smallest, but it was the handsomest mouth in the world. Nature had endowed her with all those charms which cannot be expressed, and the Graces had given the

finishing stroke to them. The turn of her face was exquisitely fine, and her swelling neck was as fair and bright as her face. In a word, her person gave the idea of Aurora, or the goddess of the spring, 'such as youthful poets fancy when they love.' But, as it would have been unjust that a single person should have engrossed all the treasures of beauty without any defect, there was something wanting in her hands and arms to render them worthy of the rest ; her nose was not the most elegant, and her eyes gave some relief, whilst her mouth and her other charms pierced the heart with a thousand darts.

"With this amiable person she was full of wit and sprightliness, and all her actions and motions were unaffected and easy ; her conversation was bewitching, when she had a mind to please ; piercing and delicate, when disposed to-raillery ; but as her imagination was subject to flights, and as she began to speak frequently before she had done thinking, her expressions did not always convey what she wished ; sometimes exceeding, and at others falling short of her ideas."

The first favourite in the race was Richard Talbot, afterwards Duke of Tyrconnel, who played so important a part in the Jacobite defence of Ireland. Macaulay has drawn a particularly black portrait of him. "In his youth," says that eloquent Whig advocate, "he had been one of the most noted sharpers and bullies in London. . . . He was a bad man, with nothing to recommend him except his fine person and

his taste in dress. . . . Whenever he opened his mouth he ranted and cursed and swore with frantic violence. . . . The most mercenary and crafty of mankind. . . . A cold-hearted, far-sighted sycophant. . . . One of those consummate hypocrites who makes the vice which he has no objection to show a stalking-horse to cover darker and more profitable vice which it is for his interest to hide." When Macaulay lays on the lamp-black in that slap-dash style one may generally be sure that he is over-doing it, that his victim is a Tory, and that investigation will show that the devil is not so black as he is painted. It is so in the case of Dick Talbot. He was not a man to be admired except for his physique and courage, but he was not the unmitigated ruffian that Macaulay, following the prejudiced Clarendon, makes him out to be. At any rate, with his fine person—he was the tallest and noblest-looking man in the three kingdoms—and with his £40,000 a year he presented sufficient attractions to lure the fancy of Frances Jennings. His reputation as a dare-devil rake and roysterer did not probably render him any the less attractive to her, for every woman believes that she can reform a rake and convert him into the best of husbands.

When first Dick Talbot came over from Ireland he saw no one among the ladies about the Court worthy of his attention. But there was among the Maids of Honour a Miss Boynton, who set her cap at him and determined to bring him to her feet. How she went

about the task the Comte de Grammont thus describes :

“Her person was slender and delicate ; good complexion, large motionless eyes gave at a distance an appearance of beauty that vanished upon nearer inspection ; she affected to lisp, to languish, and to have two or three fainting fits a day. The first time that Talbot cast his eyes upon her she was seized with one of these fits ; he was told that she swooned on his account ; he believed it, was eager to afford her assistance, and ever afterwards showed her some kindness.”

But the moment he set eyes on Frances Jennings, Talbot had no thought for any other woman. He proposed to her and she decided to marry him. All went well between the affianced lovers till Talbot took upon himself to rebuke Miss Jennings for her acquaintance with Miss Price, an ex-Maid of Honour, a clever and witty woman of the world, who was generally suspected of being one of the King’s procurers. The high-spirited Frances resented Talbot’s tone, and haughtily told him “that he had best attend to his own affairs, and that if he only came from Ireland to read her lectures about her conduct, he might take the trouble to go back as soon as he pleased.”

The engagement was broken off, and Miss Boynton, artfully placing herself in Talbot’s way, and giving him the sympathy he wanted, caught his heart on the rebound and captured him. It was more out of

pique than anything else that he married her—however, that did not matter to her so long as he *did* marry her.

Henry Jermyn, whose too intimate friendship with Lady Castlemaine had made him so obnoxious to Charles that he had a broad hint to absent himself from Court for a while, down in his country retreat heard of the charms of La Belle Jennings, of her incorruptible virtue, and of her absolute indifference to men in general. His vanity was piqued. He believed himself to be irresistible with women. He would go up to London and add this proud beauty to his list of conquests. Frances knew him very well by reputation as the hero of a thousand romantic love-affairs. She laughed softly to herself as she resolved to put out all her powers of charming for the purpose of bringing this “terror of husbands and plague of lovers” to her feet. Henry Jermyn was as arrant a fop and coxcomb as ever strutted, but he was very handsome, very witty, and was a consummate master of all the arts by which a man ingratiates himself with women. The consequence was that Frances, against her will, fell helplessly in love with him, and he appeared to be as deeply smitten by her. Everybody congratulated her upon her conquest, not dreaming that her own heart had been captured. For Jermyn, as heir to the Earldom of Arundel and a prospective £20,000 a year, was almost, if not quite, as brilliant a match as Talbot,

But Henry Jermyn the accepted suitor was a very different person from Henry Jermyn the ardent wooer. His ardour seemed to cool, and there was no eager pressing of his blushing betrothed to name the happy day. He appeared to be quite content to let things go on as they were. But this state of things disgusted Frances, who could not understand her lover's dilatoriness.

Just at that time the Earl of Rochester, the wittiest and wickedest and most brilliant man about town of his day, had returned incognito to London. He had been banished from Court for writing on the door of the King's bed-chamber the lines for which he is now chiefly remembered :

Here lies our sovereign lord the King,  
Whose word no man relies on :  
He never says a foolish thing,  
Nor ever does a wise one.

It was his whim on this occasion to set up as a German astrologer and physician, who not only professed to cure the ailments of those that consulted him, but to tell their fortunes as well. He was a consummate actor, and played to perfection the part he had undertaken. Only the very few who were in the secret had the slightest idea of his identity. Society may always be duped by any charlatan who professes to foretell the future. There are professional chiromancers and clairvoyants in the West End of London at this moment who make a very handsome

income by playing upon the credulity of silly women. When this sort of thing is done for shillings and sixpences, and ignorant servant-maids are the victims, the perpetrators of the fraud are sent to prison as rogues and vagabonds. When it is done for guinea fees, and the dupes are people of education and position, the quack poses as a scientific professor, and plies his or her nefarious trade unmolested. For in this country there *is* one law for the rich and another for the poor, and in this case the law takes the poor fools under its protection and leaves the rich fools to take care of themselves.

Rochester did a rare business as an astrologer. He was pretty well acquainted beforehand with the past history of most of those who came to consult him, and he had his confederates among the Maids of Honour, who kept him well posted in all the secret gossip and scandal of the Court. So that his revelations of the past amazed his clients by their startling truth, and made them all the more ready to believe his forecast of the future. Miss Price, of whom I have already written, persuaded Frances Jennings to consult this wonderful German doctor and astrologer, and Miss Jennings resolved to go and ask of the oracle an answer to this question : "Why a man who was in love with a handsome young lady was not urgent to marry her, since it was in his power to do so, and by so doing he would have an opportunity of gratifying his desires ?"



The two ladies, however, the better to hoodwink the astrologer as to their real rank and position, decided to go in the disguise of orange-girls. So, each arrayed in a hood and a serge petticoat, with a basket full of oranges on her arm, they set off from St. James's through the Park to Charing Cross. Having to pass the Duke's Theatre on their way, to which the Duke and Duchess of York were at that time paying a State visit, Frances suggested that they should go in and sell oranges right under the Royal box to test their disguise. But they did not bargain for what was to follow. They forgot that the notorious reputation of the orange-girls laid them open to the gallantries of all and sundry. Tom Killigrew, the merry writer of comedies and the last holder of the office of King's Jester, stepped up to Miss Jennings, chucked her under the chin, and tried to kiss her. Other gallants were still ruder in their familiarities, till at last the two pseudo orange-girls fled from the theatre, and, to avoid further insults, hailed a hackney coach to take them to the astrologer's. Unfortunately, just as they were ordering the coachman to stop, Brouncker, a Gentleman of the Chamber to the Duke of York, a friend of Henry Jermyn's and the best chess-player in England, came up. The sight of two orange-girls, one of them remarkably pretty, in a hackney coach naturally excited his curiosity. They recognised him, however, and bade the coachman drive on. Brouncker, scenting an

intrigue, followed warily. As they alighted from the coach he had a vision of silk stockings and buckled shoes which proved that they were two ladies masquerading as orange-girls. Pretending, however, that he had not penetrated their disguise, he came forward, and began to chaff them. In an agony of fear lest he should recognise them, Miss Price drew herself up, and haughtily bade him mind his own business. But Brouncker had already recognised them, and hurried off chuckling as he thought of the good story he should have to tell about his friend Jermyn's *fiancée*. By this time a crowd of small boys had gathered, and began stealing the oranges from the baskets, which the two ladies had quite forgotten. This audacious thieving excited the wrath of the coachman, who commenced lashing the youngsters with his whip. Their cries collected a crowd. In vain the terrified ladies implored the man not to mind the oranges, but to get up on his seat and drive quickly away—his honesty was outraged at the sight of these depredations upon the property of his fares. The ribald mob jeered at the sham orange-girls, hustled them, insulted them, and made things so extremely unpleasant for them that the frightened ladies, when they did at last regain their coach, bade the coachman drive them back without delay to St. James's, and gave up all idea of visiting the astrologer.

The next day, of course, the story of their adventure

was all over the Court in the garbled version of Brouncker. But Frances had the good sense to join in the laugh against herself, and gave such a clever and witty turn to the incident as robbed it of all the sinister significance which the spiteful Brouncker had sought to attach to it.

Still that exasperating Jermyn made no sign of a disposition to marry. Then came Prince Rupert's proposed expedition to Guinea, and the ladies spurred on their gallants to join, declaring that no "truly brave gentleman" would throw away such a chance of distinguishing himself. Henry Jermyn promptly volunteered without mentioning his intention to his lady-love. She thought it was an insult to her not to have consulted *her* wishes before taking such a step, and she resolved to pay him out for it. Accordingly, when he presented himself before her, expecting to find her in tears at the prospect of his departure on so dangerous an enterprise, he was disagreeably surprised to be received with smiles and mercilessly rallied on his sudden love of glory. "Who would ever have dreamt of *your* seeking the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth?" she exclaimed, with a sarcastic laugh; and she gave him plainly to understand that she didn't care a straw whether she ever saw his face again or not. "Bon voyage, most noble paladin," she called out to him, with a merry laugh, as he sulkily took his departure. Not content with this, she wrote a witty parody of one of Ovid's Epistles, addressed to "H. J.," which

went the round of the Court and made Jermyn such an object of ridicule that he withdrew the offer of his services to the Guinea expedition. But, though he humbly sought to regain the favour of his mistress, she would have no more of him, and he went back mortified and discomfited to the country.

At last her fate came to the high-spirited Frances in the person of the gallant soft-heart George Hamilton, brother of La Belle Elizabeth. This young gentleman was never out of love, for no sooner was he parted from one object of his adoration than he paid his *devoirs* to the first pretty woman he came across. He had been jilted by Lady Chesterfield and snubbed by La Belle Stewart, but in a week he was laying his bleeding heart at the feet of Frances Jennings, and, strange to say, she, whom far better men had found cold as ice to their suit, melted before George Hamilton's ardent glances and gave him both her heart and hand.

They were married in 1665. Hamilton took service in the army of Louis XIV., was knighted for distinguished gallantry in the field, and some six years after his marriage was killed in action in Flanders, leaving Frances a widow at the age of twenty-two with three daughters.

John Evelyn gives us a glimpse of her in his Diary a few years later. When the Earl of Berkeley was appointed Ambassador extraordinary to Paris in 1676, to arrange the treaty of Nimeguen, Evelyn accompanied the Earl on his journey as far as Dover.

"There was," he writes, "in my Lady Ambassador's company my Lady Hamilton, a sprightly young lady, much in the good graces of the family, wife of that valiant and worthy gentleman, George Hamilton, not long ago slain in the wars. She had been a Maid of Honour to the Duchess and now turned Papist."

Three years later, whilst she was still in the zenith of her beauty, she met in Paris her old lover Dick Talbot. He was a childless widower and in exile. The circumstances were propitious to a renewal of sentiment, and they were married. In 1683 Talbot, through the interest of his staunch friend the Duke of York, was restored to favour at the English Court and became Gentleman of the Chamber to the Duke, whilst his wife was made Mistress of the Robes to the new Duchess of York, Maria d'Este, with whom she was soon on most intimate terms. When the Duke came to the throne as James II. in 1685 he created Talbot Earl of Tyrconnel and made him Commander-in-chief of the King's forces in Ireland, whither his wife accompanied him. Her tact and prudence were invaluable to him, and the influence which she exercised over her husband kept him from many rash acts to which he was prompted by his fiery temper.

When James abandoned his throne, Tyrconnel refused to take the oath of allegiance to William of Orange, and placed himself at the head of the Jacobite party in Ireland. The exiled King, from his Court at St. Germain's, created Tyrconnel a Duke and com-

missioned him to act as Viceroy and Commander-in-chief of the Royal Forces. The Duchess of Tyrconnel reigned in queenly state at Dublin Castle and charmed gentle and simple alike by her grace and beauty, her wit and tact, her magnificent hospitality, and her boundless benevolence. Her three beautiful daughters added an additional attraction to the Viceregal Court. The Duchess was fortunate to get all three of them well married before the crash came. Each of them married a Viscount and they were admitted to be the three loveliest Viscountesses in the Peerage of the three Kingdoms.

When James came over to Ireland in 1689 to cheer up his Irish supporters and strike one last blow for his crown, the Duchess of Tyrconnel entertained him at Dublin Castle with such regal dignity and splendid hospitality that he vowed she was born to be a queen.

A brave woman, too, was Frances, Duchess of Tyrconnel, and never did her courage and her dignity shine more conspicuously than in the dark hour of disaster and defeat. She had passed twenty-four hours of intense anxiety and suspense when the news of the total defeat of James's army at the Boyne reached her. As soon as she knew the worst, her high spirit rose to the occasion. She gave her orders with a calmness and resolution which put fresh courage into the craven hearts around her. When the King and her husband reached the Castle, two hot, perspiring, mud-bespattered, dispirited fugitives, scarcely recognis-

able in their torn garments and dust-stained faces, they found all the attendants of the Household assembled in their State liveries to give His Majesty a royal reception, and the Duchess herself, gorgeously gowned, in a blaze of diamonds, standing proud and majestic at the head of the grand staircase to salute her Sovereign with all the honours due to royalty. Then, as James reached the step on which she stood, she knelt on one knee, congratulated him on his safe return, and pointing to the banqueting-room, with the tables laid and the lights burning, asked :

“Sire, will you be pleased to taste refreshment?”

“By my faith,” said James grimly, “I have little stomach for supper considering the sorry breakfast I have made this morning.”

But, bowing low, she led the way to the banqueting-hall and presided over the repast, already prepared, with all her wonted dignity and self-possession.

Even in the flight which took place that night she retained her superb composure and did her best to make the hurried exodus as little ignominious as possible.

From that time she took up her abode at the exiled King's Court at St. Germain's, whilst her husband made desperate efforts to restore the fortunes of his fallen master in Ireland. In 1691 he commenced his forlorn defence of Limerick, and held the city gallantly till all hope was lost—save that of prolonging the struggle till he should receive from St. Germain's permission

to treat for an honourable surrender. He induced his desponding fellow countrymen to bind themselves by an oath not to capitulate till James's answer should arrive. But before it came he was dead. Rumour said that he had been poisoned by a deadly drug administered in a cup of ratafia. But probably the following account of his death given by Macaulay is the correct one :

“A few days after the oath had been administered Tyrconnel was no more. On August 11th he dined with D'Usson. The party was gay. The Lord-Lieutenant seemed to have thrown off the load which had bowed down his body and mind : he drank, he jested : he was again the Dick Talbot who had dined and revelled with Grammont. Soon after he had risen from table, an apoplectic stroke deprived him of speech and sensation. On the fourteenth he breathed his last. The wasted remains of that form which had once been a model for statuary were laid under the pavement of the cathedral ; but no inscription, no tradition, preserves the memory of the spot.”

The Duchess of Tyrconnel was, as I have said, an elder sister of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, and in 1708 Frances visited England secretly to obtain assistance in her sore distress from her sister, who had ever been on the winning side. There is a romantic story to the effect that whilst the Duchess of Tyrconnel was waiting for an interview with her sister, she maintained herself by selling lace and haberdashery at one of the



small stalls which were then let out to hucksters at the Royal Exchange and were a favourite resort of women of fashion. There, wrapped in a long, loose white dress which concealed her figure, and wearing a white mask which she never removed, the once proud and stately Duchess sold her wares to the ladies who, attracted by her strange garb and appearance, flocked to her stall to gratify their curiosity.

But the correspondence of her sister, the Duchess of Marlborough, lately published, seems to set both the manner of her visit, and the conduct of the Duke of Marlborough, in a light which makes me sceptical as to the truth of that story. The Duke was in Flanders, occupied in the movements which preceded the battle of Oudenarde. On May 14th he writes to the Duchess from Brussels: "I went yesterday to wait upon Lady Tyrconnel, who I think is grown very old, and her hoarseness much worse than when I saw her last." Three days after, May 17th, he again writes: "I was yesterday a long while with Lady Tyrconnel, who complains very much of the non-payment of their rents; by what they say I am afraid they are very unjustly dealt with." On the 24th of the same month the Duke says: "When I took leave of Lady Tyrconnel, she told me that her jointure in Ireland was in such disorder that there was an absolute necessity for her going there for two or three months for the better selling of it. As the climate of Ireland will not permit her being there in the winter, she should begin her journey

about ten days hence : she said she did intend to go to London, but hoped she might have the pleasure of seeing you at St. Albans. I offered her all that might be in my power to make her journey to Holland and England easy. As also that if she cared to stay at St. Albans, either at her going or return, you would offer it her with good heart. You will find her face a good deal changed, but in the discourse I have had with her she seems to be very reasonable and kind." On the 31st : "I had a letter yesterday from your sister, Lady Tyrconnel, in which she tells me that she leaves Brussels in two or three days, and that her stay in Holland will be no longer than by going by the first safe opportunity, so that you will hear very quickly from her."

That she came to England seems certain, but what kind of reception she met with from her sister does not appear. Eventually the Duchess returned to Dublin to live poor, proscribed, broken-hearted where she had once reigned in queenly splendour. Out of the wrecks of her property she received enough to establish a nunnery of the order of the Poor Clares, and there, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," devoted the rest of her life to works of charity and acts of piety. She had passed fourscore, when one cold February night, which was long remembered for the intense frost, she fell out of bed. She was too feeble to rise or call for assistance, and in the morning they found her lying in her nightdress on the bare floor of her cell, frozen

to death. Her life had been a chequered one, with more of sorrow than of joy in it, but through it all she had borne herself blamelessly and well. Whether I regard her as the witty and beautiful Maid of Honour, as the brilliant and charming Lady Hamilton, as the noble and dignified Duchess of Tyrconnel, or as the devoted, unselfish, saintly Mother of her little sisterhood of Poor Clares, she seems to me to stand out as a most rare and wholly admirable woman, of the lofty type whose "price is above rubies."

The temptations of the Court, to which La Belle Hamilton and La Belle Jennings rose superior, were subtle, seductive and perilous, and I have the highest admiration for the splendid courage and the incomparable virtue which carried those ladies unscathed through such an ordeal. But if the temptations of the Court were great, surely those of the Stage were greater ; and yet there were actresses of that licentious age who bore themselves as honourably and discreetly, under conditions at least equally trying to their self-respect, as the two patterns of prudence and virtue with whom I have been dealing. The story of Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Oldfield is a fitting sequel to that of the Comtesse de Grammont and the Duchess of Tyrconnel.

## CHAPTER IV

### RIVAL STAGE QUEENS

IT requires a considerable effort of imagination on the part of a modern play-goer, familiar with the decorous representations at the London theatres of to-day, to picture the stage as it was in the latter part of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century. There is a great gulf fixed nowadays between the players on one side of the footlights and the audience on the other. Any one of the latter who dared to invade the stage during the performance of the play would be promptly expelled, and probably handed over to the police. The offence would be considered far graver than even "brawling" in church. But two hundred, or even as late as a hundred and thirty, years ago, those who could afford to pay for the privilege were permitted to have seats on the stage, where they smoked and ate oranges and chaffed the players at their own sweet will. Every one who has read *Esmond* will recollect the scene where Lord Castlewood and Lord Mohun and Harry Esmond, just before the fatal duel, visit the Duke's playhouse, to see Mr. Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*, in which

Mrs. Bracegirdle played the chief girl's part. "She was disguised as a page, and came and stood before the gentlemen as they sat on the stage, and looked over her shoulder with a pair of arch black eyes and laughed at my Lord, and asked what ailed the gentleman from the country, and had he had bad news from Bullock Fair? Between the acts of the play the gentlemen crossed over and conversed freely. My Lord had a paper of oranges, which he ate and offered to the actresses, joking with them. And Mrs. Bracegirdle, when my Lord Mohun said something rude, turned on him and asked him what he did there, and whether he and his friends had come to stab anybody else as they did poor Will Mountford? My Lord's dark face grew darker at this taunt, and wore a mischievous, fatal look."

It was but some forty years before this that the first public actress made her appearance on the English stage, for female characters had heretofore been acted by boys. And when, in 1656, Mrs. Coleman appeared as Ianthe in Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes*, there was a storm of controversy over the innovation. But the change added to the stage a piquant element which was hailed with delight by the *blasés* rakes of the Restoration, and the actress came to stay. It needed, however, uncommon boldness, or shamelessness if you will, on the part of any woman to face the ribald badinage of the *roués* who took their seats upon the stage after the manner I have described ;



*From an engraving by Harding, after a picture by Stow.*

MRS. BRACEGIRDLE.



consequently the actress was regarded as a creature lost to all sense of shame, and fair game for coarse jests and dishonourable proposals. Nor did the actresses make any attempt to defend their reputations, which were, in fact, usually soiled before their owners appeared upon the boards.

The first woman who successfully withstood the temptations which then beset the actress, and lived an irreproachable life under conditions which to the cynic seemed to render virtue impossible, was Ann Bracegirdle. And it seems to me that she deserves far more honour and admiration than she ever received, for carrying her fair fame unsullied through such perils as perhaps never assailed a beautiful woman before or since. To men of the world her chaste life seemed incredible. Macaulay makes himself the mouthpiece of such sceptics when he thus describes her :

“It was said of her that in the crowded theatres she had as many lovers as there were male spectators. Yet no lover, however rich, however high in rank, had prevailed on her to be his mistress. Those who are acquainted with the parts she was in the habit of playing, and with the epilogues which it was her special business to recite, will not easily give her credit for any extraordinary measure of virtue or delicacy. She seems to have been a cold, vain, and interested coquette, who perfectly understood how much the influence of her charms was increased by the fame of a severity which cost her nothing, and who could



venture to flirt with a succession of admirers, in the just confidence that no flame which she might kindle in them would thaw her own ice."

That sneer at her delicacy and virtue appears to me singularly mean, when it is borne in mind how coarse was the plain-speaking of those days even in ordinary society : and surely it would be as fair to credit the actor who plays the villain of a piece with the sentiments put in his mouth by the dramatist, as to insist that an actress who plays risky parts must have a natural sympathy with the *rôle* she enacts. I prefer to accept the evidence of one who knew her. Tony Aston, in his "Brief Supplement" to Colley Cibber's Apology, gives this account of her :

"Mrs. Bracegirdle, that Diana of the stage, hath many places contending for her Birth.—The most received opinion is, that she was the Daughter of a Coachman, Coachmaker, or letter-out of coaches in the Town of Northampton.—But I am inclined to my father's opinion, (who had a very great Value for her reported Virtue,) that she was a distant Relation, and came out of Staffordshire, from about Walsal or Wolverhampton.—She had many assailants on her Virtue, as Lord Lovelace, Mr. Congreve, the last of which had her company most ; but she ever resisted his vicious attacks, and yet, was always uneasy at his leaving her ; on which observation he made the following song :

"Pious Celinda goes to Pray'rs  
 Whene'er I ask the favour ;  
 Yet, the tender Fool's in Tears,  
 When she believes I'll leave her.  
 Would I were free from this restraint,  
 Or else had Power to win her !  
 Wou'd she cou'd make of me a Saint,  
 Or I of her a Sinner !

"And, as Mr. Durfey alludes to it in his Puppet  
 Song—in *Don Quixot* :

"Since that our Fate intends  
 Our Amity shall be no dearer,  
 Still let us kiss and be friends,  
 And sigh we shall never come nearer.

"She was very shy of Lord Lovelace's company, as  
 being an engaging man, who drest well : and, as every  
 day his servant came to her, to ask how she did, she  
 always returned her Answer in the most obeisant words  
 and behaviour. That she was indifferent well, she  
 humbly thank'd his Lordship.—She was of a lovely  
 height, with dark brown Hair and Eye-brows, black  
 sparkling Eyes, and a fresh blushy Complexion ; and,  
 whenever she exerted herself, had an involuntary  
 flushing in her Breast, Neck and Face, having con-  
 tinually a chearful Aspect, and a fine set of even white  
 Teeth ; never making an Exit, but she left the  
 Audience in an imitation of her pleasant countenance.  
 Genteel Comedy was her chief Essay, and that too  
 when in Men's Cloaths, in which she far surmounted  
 all the Actresses of that and this Age.—Yet she had a  
 defect scarce perceptible, viz., her right shoulder a little

protruded, which, when in Men's Cloaths, was covered by a long or Campaign Peruke.—She was finely shaped and had very handsome Legs and Feet ; and her gait, or walk, was free, manlike, and modest, when in Breeches. Her Virtue had its Reward, both in Applause and Specie ; for it happened that as the Dukes of Dorset and Devonshire, Lord Hallifax and other nobles over a bottle were all extolling Mrs. Bracegirdle's Virtuous behaviour, *Come*, says Lord Hallifax—*You all commend her virtue, etc., but why do we not present this incomparable Woman with something worthy of her Acceptance?* His Lordship deposited 200 Guineas, which the rest made up to 800, and sent to her, with Encomiums on her Virtue.—She was, when on the *stage*, diurnally charitable, going often into *Clare Market*, and giving money to the poor unemployed Basket-women, insomuch that she could not pass that neighbourhood without the thankful acclamation of people of all Degrees ; so that, if any Person had affronted her, they would have been in danger of being killed directly ; and yet this good woman was an Actress.”

“*And yet this good woman was an Actress!*” That was the marvellous thing about it to worthy Master Tony Aston. We have learned since his day that the noblest traits of womanhood are often found among actresses, not generally in the prudes of the profession, but in the warm-hearted, generous, impulsive women, who, knowing what it is to be tempted and even perhaps

to fall, have for that very reason a deeper sympathy with the erring and the sinful.

There is nothing in that sketch of Tony Aston's to warrant the notion that Ann Bracegirdle was "a cold, vain, and interested coquette." The mere description of her personal appearance negatives that assumption. The "black sparkling eyes," the "fresh blushy complexion," the "involuntary flushing in her breast, neck and face," are physical attributes wholly inconsistent with a cold temperament. Then again it must be remembered that Ann Bracegirdle, unlike other actresses of her time, who owed their introduction to the stage to male admirers, was trained for the theatre from the time she was a child. She was placed as an infant under the care of the great actor, Thomas Betterton, and his wife, and she made her first appearance on the stage at the Duke's Theatre, Dorset Place, in *The Orphan*, when she was but six years of age. She was familiar with the surroundings of the theatre, and schooled to be on her guard against temptations, before she had entered on her teens. She learned to be bold without being shameless and to throw away shyness without losing self-respect. She had, therefore, the unique distinction of appearing on the stage with an unspotted reputation and yet with a perfect knowledge of the dangers of the profession she had adopted.

It would not be too much to say that she took the town by storm when at the age of five-and-twenty, in the full bloom of her womanhood, she made her first

hit as Lucia in Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia*, and from that day till she bade her farewell to the stage in the plenitude of her charms "Bracey," as her admirers affectionately called her, was the idol of the public.

Colley Cibber says "she had no greater claim to beauty than what the most desirable brunette might aspire to." But then Colley did not affect brunettes, and saw as little to admire in them as the Aunts Pullett and Glegg did in the brown skin and rich dark tresses of Maggie Tulliver. The play-going public, however, was of a different opinion, and, as Colley himself admits, "it was ever a fashion among the gay and gallant to have a taste and *tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle." "Bracey" was as popular among the "boys," in fact, as Nellie Farren in our own time, and her saucy laugh, when she opened those rosy lips of hers and showed her beautiful white teeth, never failed to put an audience in good humour.

It is not easy at this distance of time to decide whether her acting were of a first-rate order or not. Her range, both in tragedy and comedy, was wide, and embraced such Shakesperian characters as Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, Portia, Desdemona, Ophelia, Cordelia, and Mrs. Ford in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. But it was in Congreve's comedies that she won her greatest triumphs, and her own favourite part was Angelica in *Love for Love*. It is with Congreve's name, too, that her own is associated in a closer relation than that of friendship. He certainly left her a legacy of

£200, and that has been regarded, by those who would not believe it possible that an actress of those days could be virtuous, as a proof that the intimacy between them was more than platonic. But surely there was nothing so very remarkable in a dramatist leaving a legacy to the actress who had done so much to make his plays successful. Beyond the fact of the legacy, there is no evidence whatever to warrant the suspicion that Mrs. Bracegirdle surrendered to Congreve what she denied to all her other admirers.

Mrs. Bracegirdle was at the height of her fame when the tragic event happened which has done more than anything else to keep her memory green. Among the many lovers who pestered the beautiful actress with their addresses was Captain Richard Hill, an officer in Colonel Earle's Regiment. He was so madly in love with her that no rebuffs could drive him away, and no coldness or disdain on her part had any effect in cooling his passion. His most intimate friend was Charles, Lord Mohun, then a mere lad of eighteen just entering upon life. Hill, so the usually accepted story goes, believed that Mrs. Bracegirdle would have listened to his suit but for the influence of a well-known and popular actor, William Mountford. On several occasions Hill was heard in taverns and other public resorts to say that but for Mountford Mrs. Bracegirdle would marry him, and that he meant to have Mountford's blood. And, on one of these occasions, when he had threatened

to stab his rival, Lord Mohun, who was with him, was heard to say, "And I'll stand by my friend."

Captain Hill, finding that he could not soften the heart of the charming actress, in desperation resolved to seize her and carry her off by force. In this design Lord Mohun cordially assisted his friend. A coach was hired, and a number of soldiers and bullies were engaged to assist in the abduction. On the evening of December 9th, 1692, the conspirators proceeded to carry their plot into execution. It was discovered that Mrs. Bracebridge was not at the theatre that night, but was supping with some friends named Page in Drury Lane. The house was carefully watched, and as Mrs. Bracegirdle came out with her mother and brother and Mr. Page she was suddenly seized by a couple of soldiers who tried to force her into a coach standing close by. She resisted, her mother clung to her ; Mr. Page, after parrying with his cane the sword-strokes of Captain Hill, raised the alarm ; people rushed from the adjoining houses, beat off the soldiers and bullies, and escorted Mrs. Bracegirdle to her house in Howard Street, Strand. Captain Hill and Lord Mohun followed ; and, after Mrs. Bracegirdle had entered her house, walked up and down the street outside with drawn swords ; then wine was sent for, which they drank in the street, still flourishing their drawn swords, and declaring that they would be revenged on Will Mountford. For two hours they waited there, till at last Mount-

ford, who lived in Norfolk Street, which crosses Howard Street at right angles, appeared upon the scene. Mohun went up to him and embraced him. Whilst he was holding the actor in converse, Hill stepped up, struck Mountford in the face with his left hand, whilst at the same moment he ran him through the body with the sword which he held drawn in his right hand. The cry of "Murder" was raised by some bystanders ; Hill fled, but Mohun waited and surrendered himself to the constables who came up on hearing the cry of "Murder." My lord was marched off to the lock-up, and subsequently bailed out by two noblemen in bonds of £2,000 each. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of "Wilful Murder" against both Captain Hill and Lord Mohun, and the Grand Jury of Middlesex subsequently found a true bill against both the accused. Hill was still uncaptured, and Lord Mohun, exercising his privilege as a peer, demanded to be tried by his peers.

This, as I have said, was the popular and generally accepted version of what happened, but I shall presently show that the evidence given at the trial throws a different complexion upon the affair.

Now Will Mountford was the most popular actor then on the English stage. His noble figure, his handsome face, his melodious voice, his graceful manner, had won universal favour. In his personal appearance, his dramatic gifts, and his tragic fate he seems



to me to have borne a strong resemblance to William Terriss, and in many respects the horror and indignation aroused by the murder of our own lamented actor had its parallel in the feelings excited by the death of handsome Will Mountford. Moreover, Mrs. Mountford was one of the most charming and accomplished actresses of her time, and public sympathy was strongly roused on her behalf. There was but one opinion amongst, at any rate, the middle and lower classes, and that was that Will Mountford had been cruelly and treacherously done to death, and that his murderers ought to be brought to swift and condign punishment. The trial of Lord Mohun, therefore, was looked forward to with intense excitement.

A court was specially constructed in Westminster Hall, and thither on the morning of January 31st, 1693, the Peers in their robes, with Garter-King-at-arms, four sergeants-at-arms, yeomen, ushers in their gorgeous array, filed in procession from the House of Lords. The Marquis of Carmarthen, as Lord High Steward, presided over the trial. His opening address to the prisoner at the bar was solemn and dignified. He commented on Lord Mohun's extreme youth, and assured him that he had nothing to fear in that court but from his own guilt. "But at the same time," he added, "I must tell you that your lordship is not to flatter yourself that any favour will be showed you beyond what honour and justice can allow."

The indictment charged Lord Mohun with being "present, aiding and abetting, comforting and maintaining the aforesaid Richard Hill in form aforesaid, feloniously, wilfully and of malicious aforethought to kill and murder."

Then the Clerk of the Court put the question, "How say you, Charles Lord Mohun, are you guilty of this felony and murder or not guilty?"

And Lord Mohun made reply, "Not guilty, my lords."

"How will your lordship be tried?"

"By God and my peers."

"God send your lordship a good deliverance."

Then the trial began. After the Attorney-General had opened the case for the prosecution he called witnesses to prove that Captain Hill had on various occasions been heard to say that the only obstacle to his success in his designs on Mrs. Bracegirdle was William Mountford, and that he meant to have Mountford's life. On these occasions Lord Mohun was with him, and once, when Hill had said, "If the villain resists I'll stab him," Mohun said, "And I'll stand by my friend." Now, it will be noted that this threat was contingent upon resistance on the part of Mountford, a point to be remembered in judging the case for the defence. Evidence was given of the hiring of the coach, and then a thrill went through the crowded court as the Attorney-General announced that he should next call Mrs. Ann Bracegirdle to give her

version of what had happened on that fatal night. All eyes were fastened on the beautiful and popular actress as she entered the witness-box and kissed the Book. I shall give her own words as taken down and preserved in the report of the trial.

*Attorney-General* : Mrs. Bracegirdle, pray give my lord an account of the whole of your knowledge of the attempt that was made upon you in Drury Lane and what followed upon it.

*Mrs. Bracegirdle* : My lord, I was in Prince's Street at supper at Mr. Page's, and at ten o'clock at night Mr. Page went home with me ; and coming down Drury Lane there stood a coach by my Lord Craven's door, and the hood of the coach was drawn, and a great many men stood by it ; and just as I came to the place where the coach stood, two soldiers came and pushed me from Mr. Page, and four or five men came up to them and they knocked my mother down almost, for my mother and my brother were with me. My mother recovered and came and hung about my neck, so that they could not get me into the coach, and Mr. Page went to call company to rescue me. Then Mr. Hill came with his drawn sword and struck at Mr. Page and my mother : and when they could not get me into the coach because company came up he said he would see me home, and he led me by one hand and my mother by the other. And when we came home he pulled Mr. Page by the sleeve and said, " Sir, I would speak with you."

*Attorney-General* : Pray, Mrs. Bracegirdle, did you see anybody in the coach when they pulled you to it ?

*Mrs. Bracegirdle* : Yes, my Lord Mohun was in the coach, and when they pulled me to the coach I saw my Lord Mohun in the coach. As they led me along Drury Lane, my Lord Mohun came out of the coach and followed us, and all the soldiers followed them ; but they were dismissed, and, as I said, when we came to our lodgings Mr. Hill pulled Mr. Page by the sleeve and said he would speak with him. Saith Mr. Page, “ Mr. Hill, another time will do, to-morrow will serve ” : with that, when I was within doors, Mr. Page was pulled into the house and Mr. Hill walked up and down the street with his sword drawn. He had his sword drawn when he came along with me.

*Attorney-General* : Did you observe him to say anything whilst he was with you ?

*Mrs. Bracegirdle* : As I was going down the hill, he said, as he held me, he would be revenged.

*Attorney-General* : Did he say of whom he would be revenged ?

*Mrs. Bracegirdle* : He did not name of whom then, but when I was in the house, several persons went to the door, and afterwards Mrs. Browne went to the door and spoke to them and asked them what they stayed and waited there for ? At last they said they stayed to be revenged of Mr. Mountford, and then Mrs. Browne came in to me and told me of it.

*Attorney-General* : Were my Lord Mohun and Mr.

Hill both together when that was said, that they stayed to be revenged of Mr. Mountford ?

*Mrs. Bracegirdle* : Yes, they were. And when Mrs. Browne came in and told me, I sent my brother and the maid and all the people we could out of the house to Mrs. Mountford to desire her to send, if she knew where her husband was, to tell him of it, and she did. And when they came indoors again I went to the door, and the doors were shut, and I listened to hear if they were there still : and my Lord Mohun and Mr. Hill were walking up and down the street ; and by-and-by the watch came up to them, and when the watch came they said, "Gentlemen, why do you walk with your swords drawn ?" Says my Lord Mohun, "I am a peer of England : touch me if you dare." Then the watch left them and they went away, and a little after there was a cry of murder ; and that is all that I know, my lord."

Both the surgeons who attended on Mountford deposed that the dying actor declared that, whilst Mohun engaged him in talk, "Hill with his left hand struck me, and with his right hand ran me through before I had time to put my hand to my sword." But of the six witnesses who saw the deed committed five swore that both men drew their swords and fought in the middle of the street, with Lord Mohun looking on from the causeway, and that it was not till Mountford's sword broke that he received the fatal wound. These five were all called for the defence. The one eyewitness on

whose evidence the prosecution relied was Mrs. Brewer, and I subjoin her statement in her own words :

“When Mr. Mountford came down the street I stood at the door, and my Lord Mohun was come to the door, and my Lord Mohun went to him and said, ‘Mr. Mountford, your humble servant. I am glad to see you,’ and embraced him. Saith Mr. Mountford, ‘Who is this? My Lord Mohun?’ ‘Yes,’ saith he, ‘it is.’ ‘What maketh your lordship here at this time of night?’ Saith my Lord Mohun, ‘I suppose you are sent from Mrs. Mountford.’ ‘No, indeed,’ said he, ‘I came by chance.’ Saith my lord, ‘You have heard of the business of Mrs. Bracegirdle.’ With that, after he had said this, Mr. Hill cometh up and saith, ‘Pray, my lord, hold your tongue, this is not a convenient time to discourse this business,’ and would have drawn my lord away. Saith Mr. Mountford, ‘I am very sorry, my lord, to see that your lordship should assist Captain Hill in such an action as this : pray let me desire your lordship to forbear.’ Upon this, as soon as he had said so, Mr. Hill came up and struck Mr. Mountford a box on the ear. Saith Mr. Mountford, ‘Damme, what is that for?’ And with that he whipped out his sword and made a pass at him, and I turned and cried out, ‘Murder ! murder !’ ”

Questioned further by the Attorney-General, she contradicted her first statement and said that Hill had his sword already drawn when he struck Mountford on the ear.

When Lord Mohun at the close of the case for the prosecution was called upon to speak he said, "My lords, I hope it will be no disadvantage to me my not summing up my evidence like a lawyer, being a young man. I think I have made it plainly appear that there never was any formal quarrel or malice between Mr. Mountford and me. I have also made appear the reason why we stayed so long on the street, which was for Mr. Hill to speak with Mrs. Bracegirdle and ask her pardon, and I stayed with him as my friend. So it plainly appeareth I had no hand in killing of Mr. Mountford, and upon the confidence of my own innocency I surrendered myself to this honourable house where I know I shall have all the justice in the world."

"Has your lordship no more to say?" asked the Lord High Steward.

"No, my lord, but I am innocent of the fact, and leave myself wholly to your lordships."

Now, the weak point in the case for the prosecution was that they could not satisfactorily prove that Mohun and Hill were actually waiting in Howard Street for Mountford. The actor lived in Norfolk Street, and, instead of going straight to his house, he turned out of his way down Howard Street, for what reason no one could tell. He, therefore, of his own choice came to meet Mohun and Hill, and it was not until he had spoken words about Hill, which the latter naturally resented, that a blow was struck. All this

militates strongly against the supposition that Mohun and Hill were waiting there with the deliberate intention of murdering Mountford. And when, after the trial had lasted five days, sixty-nine peers voted Mohun "Not guilty," whilst only fourteen found him "Guilty," I think the verdict of the majority was the right one with the evidence before them. It was an age of brawling and duelling, and all that could be urged against Lord Mohun was that he was present when his friend killed a man after what five eye-witnesses against one declared to have been a fair fight. Macaulay says that the King (William III.) was present during the whole of the trial, and was convinced that the crime of murder was fully brought home to Mohun. After going carefully through the evidence, as it is given verbatim in the State Trials, I cannot see how any impartial person can pronounce it conclusive, and surely Lord Mohun was as much entitled to the benefit of the doubt as any felon of lesser degree arraigned before a common jury. No doubt Mohun's subsequent career proved him to be an unscrupulous scoundrel. But he was only eighteen when he was put upon his trial for the murder of Mountford, and up to that time had done nothing worse than any other dissipated young nobleman of his age. He has been judged in this Mountford affair in the light of his subsequent misdeeds, but that surely is grossly unjust both to him and the peers who acquitted him.

No doubt popular indignation was fierce against the



verdict of acquittal. There was a prevailing opinion that if Lord Mohun had been a mere commoner he would not have escaped. But then popular indignation is not always just. Probably if Richard Prince had been the scion of a noble house, there would have been an outcry against the verdict of insanity in his case, and there would have been thousands of ignorant people who would have declared that if a poor man had murdered William Terriss he would have swung for it. But would their indignation have convinced any reasonable man that there had been a miscarriage of justice?

Macaulay tells us that "a great nobleman was so brutal and stupid as to say that 'after all, the fellow was but a player, and players are rogues.'" If a "great nobleman" did use those words, he only expressed an opinion as to the general character of players which was prevalent in all circles. One of the witnesses in the trial, Elizabeth Walker, Mrs. Bracegirdle's servant, gave as the reason for her not returning to her mistress after giving her evidence before the justices, the fact "that they being all players I was afraid, because players have a worse reputation than other people." It was not until nearly two hundred years later that society became charitable enough to admit that the player's reputation is, if no better, at any rate, no worse than that of "other people."

One effect of Will Mountford's tragic death and the

trial of Lord Mohun was to increase Mrs. Bracegirdle's popularity. She held her own, supreme and unapproachable in public favour, until in 1706 a rival appeared upon the scene in the rising star, Nance Oldfield. Mrs. Bracegirdle was then about forty-four ; her charms were on the wane. For eighteen years she had been the idol of the town. It could not reasonably be expected that her old admirers would continue their allegiance when a woman twenty years younger, handsomer, perhaps, than Mrs. Bracegirdle in her prime, and a better actress to boot, challenged her supremacy. Yet "Bracey" had still many staunch supporters, and a fierce controversy raged over the respective merits of the rival actresses. If tradition is to be believed, they consented to put the vexed question to the test and abide by the decision of the public. The part chosen was that of Mrs. Brittle in Betterton's *Amorous Widow*. Mrs. Bracegirdle was to play the rôle one night, Mrs. Oldfield the next. The decision was in favour of the younger actress. Whether Mrs. Bracegirdle would have accepted the verdict as conclusive proof of her rival's superiority may be doubted, but when, in addition, the management showed preference for Mrs. Oldfield by assigning her the first benefit, then Ann Bracegirdle felt that her day was past, and in disgust she abruptly quitted the stage. Once more, two years later, she re-appeared on the boards for Betterton's benefit, and played her favourite rôle of Angelica in *Love for Love*, with undiminished *chic* and

spirit. After that she was never again seen as a player, though she survived her successful rival by eighteen years. But she was not forgotten by any means. Her house in Howard Street was frequented by wits and gallants even when she had reached fourscore. Horace Walpole was one of those who often paid her visits, and to him we are indebted for a story illustrative of the calm manner in which she used to repel the advances of objectionable suitors. "One day," he says, "Lord Burlington, who had long loved her in vain, sent her a present of some fine old china. She told the servant that he had made a mistake ; that it was true the letter was for her, but the china for his lady, to whom he must carry it. Lord ! The Countess was so full of gratitude when her husband came home to dinner ! "

We have another pleasant glimpse of her in her old age in the following anecdote :—David Garrick had just come to the front, and taken the town by storm. A group of visitors at Mrs. Bracegirdle's were discussing the merits of the new actor, and Colley Cibber spoke disparagingly of Garrick's performance as Bayes in *The Rehearsal*, which he said was far inferior to that of his own son Theophilus. Mrs. Bracegirdle had not seen Garrick act, but tapping Cibber with her fan she said :

"Come, come, Colley, tell me if there is not something like envy in your character of this young gentleman. The actor who pleases everybody, as



*From a picture drawn and engraved by J. Simon.*

NANCE OLDFIELD.



I'm told Mr. Garrick does, must be a man of merit."

Cibber smiled, tapped his snuff-box, took a pinch, and catching the good-hearted old actress's generosity said :

"Faith ! Bracey, I believe you're right. The young fellow *is* clever."

Not till she had passed her eighty-fifth year did Ann Bracegirdle show any signs of decay, mentally or physically. Then she suddenly broke up, and died on September 18th, 1748, forty years after her retirement from the stage. She was buried in the east cloisters of Westminster Abbey. Her rival, Mrs. Oldfield had for eighteen years been resting under the same roof.

I have said that Mrs. Bracegirdle deserves honour and respect as the first actress who, though she did not escape calumny, lived, so far as there is any direct evidence to the contrary, a blameless life. Mrs. Oldfield, though she could not claim that distinction, could at any rate boast that she was the first actress who conquered for herself a place in Society, for she was not only received at Court, but was on intimate terms with the Queen and the highest ladies in the Peerage.

It is said that she was a gentlewoman by birth, and that her father held a commission in the Guards. But her grandfather was a vintner, and it is probable that "Captain" Oldfield held no higher rank than

that of a non-commissioned officer. Be this as it may, on his death he left his wife penniless, and his daughter was apprenticed to a sempstress in King Street, Westminster. Nance, however, lived with her aunt, Mrs. Voss, who kept the Mitre Tavern in St. James's Market. The girl spent most of her time in reading plays. One day, when she was reading aloud in the bar-parlour from *The Scornful Lady* of Beaumont and Fletcher, a young officer, who had lounged into the bar for his morning draught, overheard her, and was struck with the richness of her voice and her elocution, marked by "so proper an emphasis and such agreeable turns suited to each character." He looked in, and saw an extremely handsome girl of sixteen. When she raised her eyes he noticed how brilliant they were, but on seeing him she dropped them, blushed, and put her book away; then rose to her feet, revealing a slim, graceful figure. He begged her to go on with her reading. She blushed and hesitated, then, finally, with a bashful air took up the book, though she afterwards merrily confessed, "I longed to be at it, and only needed a little decent entreaty." The young officer was Captain George Farquhar, who, though but two-and-twenty, was already famous as the author of the successful comedy *Love and a Bottle*. He made known his discovery of this budding genius to a brother officer, Captain John Vanbrugh, who had made his mark both as a playwright and an

architect. Vanbrugh spoke to the Duke of Bedford, the Duke spoke to Rich, the manager of the Lincoln's Inn Theatre, and the result was that Nance was engaged at a salary of fifteen shillings a week, soon afterwards increased, on His Grace of Bedford's suggestion, to twenty shillings.

But the débutante disappointed her patrons. She showed little dramatic talent, and her good looks alone saved her from being an utter failure. Nevertheless, the talent was there, and it was only lack of confidence that kept it hidden. At last she got her chance, and did not let it slip. It was at Bath in the summer of 1703, when the Queen was there and the city was filled with rank and fashion. Mrs. Verbruggen, the widow of Will Mountford, then the leading actress on the London stage, was taken ill. There was a scramble for her parts. Only one fell to the lot of Nance Oldfield, that of Leonora in *Sir Courtley Nice*, a play adapted from the *Mayor Impossible* of the Spanish dramatist Lope de Vega. Colley Cibber was cast for the title rôle, and he found the actress so careless and slovenly in rehearsal that he fully expected a *fiasco*. But when she came on the stage before a brilliant and crowded house, her acting electrified not only the audience but her fellow players, and none more than Colley Cibber himself. She sprang into fame at a bound, and from that moment her career was one of unchequered success. She created the part of Lady Betty Modish in Cibber's *Careless Husband*, a play



which that author had thrown aside in sheer despair of finding an actress to play the chief female character. Mrs. Oldfield was an ideal Lady Betty Modish. It was strange how perfectly the young girl from the bar-parlour of the Mitre Tavern had acquired the airs, affectations, and graces of women of fashion and quality. Her silvery voice, her pleasing and expressive face, her large speaking eyes, bewitched her audiences. Dicky Steele, Horace Walpole, James Thomson, Henry Fielding, Richard Savage, all spoke and wrote of her with enthusiastic admiration. She seemed equally at home in tragedy and comedy, and critics vowed that it was impossible to decide whether she shone to most advantage in the tragic grandeur of parts like Cleopatra and Calista or in the vivacious audacity of rôles like Lady Betty Modish and Lady Townley.

At this time she was living, in what John Oldmixon calls "strict alliance of friendship," with Arthur Maynwaring, a gentleman of wit and fashion who held the post of "Auditor of Imprests" with a salary of £3,000 a year. "Each of them," says the aforesaid John Oldmixon in his biography of Maynwaring, "loved with a passion that could hardly have been stronger had it been both her and his first love." Maynwaring wrote many of her prologues and epilogues for her, and they lived happily together till the too free consumption of champagne and burgundy broke down his health. By her tender care and skilful nursing Mrs. Oldfield prolonged his life for some time

after the doctors had given up his case as hopeless. When at last he died, leaving her with a son, she was generally regarded as his widow, and it is remarkable that their relationship was not considered as casting any stain upon her character.

Subsequently she entered another "strict alliance of friendship" with Brigadier-General Churchill, a natural son of the great Duke of Marlborough's brother, by whom also she had a son. Yet this did not bar her from reception at Court. She attended the Royal *levées*, and she was to be seen on the terraces of Windsor in the company of the most illustrious ladies of England. On one occasion the Princess of Wales, afterwards Queen Caroline, said to her point-blank, "Are you really married to the General?" Mrs. Oldfield, assuming her grandest manner, replied, "So it is said, may it please your Royal Highness, but we have not owned it yet ; the General keeps his own secrets."

It was not a moral Court, and I have no doubt that Mrs. Oldfield was quite as virtuous as most of the *grandes dames* she met there. And then, as Chetwood puts it in his *History of the Stage*, "She never troubled the repose of any lady's lawful claims, and was far more constant than millions in the conjugal noose." No one was able to lay to her charge that she ever compromised herself with any man except the two to whom she was a faithful and blameless partner. She rejected overtures from the Duke of Bedford, Lord

Hervey, and many others who could have lavished upon her a hundred times the wealth at the disposal of Arthur Maynwaring or General Churchill. But she listened only to the two men whom she was able to love and honour.

So decorously did she conduct herself that the breath of scandal never touched her. And so exquisite was her taste in dress that she was "a welcome and constant visitor in families of distinction," for the women folk were all dying to learn, if possible, the secret of that wonderful knack she had, as Dicky Steele wrote in *The Tatler*, of "making everything look native about her, and having her clothes so exactly fitted that they appeared, as it were, part of her person."

It was from thus mixing in the highest society that Mrs. Oldfield was able to portray so faithfully on the stage the deportment of a lady of fashion. "Who," asks Horace Walpole, "should act genteel comedy but people of fashion that have sense? Actors and actresses can only guess at the tone of high life, and cannot be inspired with it. Mrs. Oldfield played it so well because she not only followed, but often set the fashion." But we have changed all that, and, if Horace Walpole's theory be correct, "genteel comedy" ought to be played now as it never was before, even in Mrs. Oldfield's days. Only somehow the public does not seem to care much for "genteel comedy," which is a pity.

With all her success on the stage Mrs. Oldfield's income was never very large, and at no time probably exceeded £500 a year. But that was considered a big figure in days when even an actor of Betterton's celebrity could command no more than eighty shillings a week !

Mrs. Oldfield's last appearance on the stage was in the part of Lady Brute, in Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife*, on April 8th, 1730. For a considerable time previously she had been in ill-health, and suffered such great pain that the tears were often forced from her eyes when she was acting. It must have required heroic self-control to act at all whilst her frame was racked in agony. But after that performance of Lady Brute, she felt that her nerves were no longer equal to such a terrible strain, and "the most beautiful woman that ever trod the British stage" never again appeared on the boards. Within six months she was dead. Her death took place on October 23rd, 1730, at her residence, 59, Grosvenor Street. Her faithful friend and companion, Margaret Saunders, herself an old actress, laid her out "in a very fine Brussels lace head, a holland shift, and double ruffles of the same lace, a pair of new kid gloves, and her body wrapped in a winding sheet." Every one, I suppose, knows Pope's bitter lines upon her vanity in the *Moral Essays*, as illustrating "the ruling passion strong in death."

"Odious ! in woollen ! 'twould a saint provoke,"  
Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke ;

"No, let a charming chintz and Brussels lace  
Wrap my cold limbs and shade my lifeless face.  
One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead—  
And—Betty, give this cheek a little red."

Thus arrayed, she lay in state in the Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster Abbey, and was carried thence to her grave in the west end of the nave under Congreve's monument. Among the pall-bearers were Lord Hervey, Lord Delawarr, and Bubb Dodington, afterwards Lord Melcombe. The service was performed by the Rev. Dr. Barker, the senior prebendary in residence, who, when asked if he would conduct the obsequies of the deceased actress, had, somewhat ambiguously, replied that he "would bury Mrs. Oldfield very willingly and with the greatest satisfaction." She was but forty-seven, not much more than half the age reached by her rival, Mrs. Bracegirdle.

The general verdict of Mrs. Oldfield's contemporaries pronounced her "generous, humane, witty, and well-bred." But she had her faults: members of her own profession complained that she grudged giving her services at benefits. Even those who liked her best were irritated at times by her airs of self-importance. It is told of her that on one occasion when she was on board a Gravesend boat which was in peril during a storm, she turned impatiently upon some of her fellow passengers, who were in frantic terror at the prospect of a watery grave, and in her grandest high-tragedy manner remarked, "Your deaths will be only a private loss, whereas I am a public concern." That she was

a great stickler for her professional dignity may be inferred from a reminiscence which Mrs. Bracegirdle, then an octogenarian, let fall when breakfasting with Horace Walpole. "I remember," said the cheery old actress, "at the play-house they used to call for Mrs. Oldfield's *chair*, Mrs. Barry's *clogs*, and Mrs. Bracegirdle's *pattens*." Yet there was not that difference in talent or professional status between the two actresses which the gap between the fashionable sedan-chair and the plebeian pattens would indicate—though perhaps it was a correct measure of their degrees of vanity. But when a woman is as brilliant and charming as Nance Oldfield was, one can excuse the little weaknesses which, after all, are common to popular idols of both sexes.

## CHAPTER V

### A SAINT IN SOCIETY

“**T**O behold her is an immediate check to loose behaviour; and to love her is a liberal education.”

If for no other reason than because she inspired that immortal sentence of Dicky Steele's, Lady Elizabeth Hastings is entitled to a high place on the world's bead-roll of charming women. But, glowing as the eulogies passed upon her by Steele and Congreve are, they did not exaggerate her worth, for a nobler example of the true gentlewoman has never adorned society in any age. She was not only beautiful and accomplished, a brilliant talker, a delightful companion, a dignified and courteous hostess, but she was also a *good* woman in the very highest sense of that phrase. Madame de Staël, after meeting William Wilberforce, remarked that she had long known that Mr. Wilberforce was the most pious man in England, but she was surprised to find that he was also the most agreeable. There was the same rare combination of qualities in Lady Elizabeth Hastings ;

A perfect Woman nobly planned  
To warn, to comfort, to command :  
And yet a Spirit still, and bright  
With something of an Angel light.

The daughter of Theophilus, seventh Earl of Huntingdon, by his first wife, Lady Elizabeth Hastings was born in 1682, and through her mother, a daughter of Sir John Lewis of Ledstone Hall, Yorkshire, was the heiress to a large property. The only glimpses we have of her early life are those which her biographer, Thomas Barnard, Master of the Free School of Leeds, allows us with an all too niggardly hand.

"There was," he says, "a fine dawn and twilight of her future splendour even in her most tender years : a sweetness of countenance, something in it great, and something lowly ; an ingenuous temper, an aptness of understanding, a benevolent spirit, a flexibility of nature, a tractable will, a devout frame, and an awful sense of things pertaining to piety were observed of her in her first departure out of infancy ; and the remembrance of them transmitted down to faithful relaters."

And then there comes this tantalising passage :

"Though it must not be concealed that this fine gold is not without some alloy. A young lady, of less severity of manners than herself, invited her once to an entertainment over a romance ; and most dear did she pay for it ; what evil tincture she took



from it I cannot tell ; but this I can, that the remembrance of it would now and then annoy her spirit down into declining life."

Now, what would we not give to know the nature of that "entertainment over a romance" which wrought such direful consequences! I count it criminal negligence on the part of Master Thomas Barnard not to have been more explicit. In the interests of morality he should have given some details of that demoralising "entertainment" for the warning of the young and thoughtless. "An entertainment over a romance!" It is so vague, and yet it sounds simple and innocent enough. Was it a play? A comedy of Mr. Congreve's perhaps? Well, there are passages in the plays of that witty dramatist which might have made a virtuous maiden blush even in those days, when speech and manners were coarser than they are now. Or was it one of Captain Steele's—say *The Funeral or Grief à la mode*—in which Dicky tried to counteract the effect produced by his own *Christian Hero*? Conceive a Captain of the Guards writing the *Christian Hero*! Yet Dicky was in earnest when he wrote it. He took his religion very seriously when he did take it. He was no hypocrite; though his life was passed in about equal portions of sinning and repenting. When he was sinning he wrote comedies and drank more wine than was good for him. When he was repenting he wrote pious books and wept copiously on the bosom of his

excellent, if somewhat shrewish, wife. But whether or not either of these gentlemen were the author of that "entertainment over a romance" which played such havoc with Lady Elizabeth's peace of mind, one thing is certain, that both of them were her most sincere and enthusiastic admirers. I can understand Steele's admiration for her. He had a high ideal of womanhood and could appreciate the religious side of Lady Elizabeth's character. But I confess that Congreve's admiration puzzles me. What attraction could a woman of this severe and lofty type have for a rake and a cynic? Yet it was Congreve who began that eloquent panegyric in *The Tatler* which Steele afterwards supplemented. In both cases Lady Elizabeth is brought forward as an illustration to prove a thesis. Congreve, writing of the difference in the characters of women on the stage in the preceding age from those in his own day, and remarking how small a figure Shakespeare's women make in his dialogues, because he painted the sex as he knew it, proceeds to show how superior the women of a later time were :

"But these ancients would be as much astonished to see in the same age so illustrious a pattern to all who love things praise-worthy as the divine Aspasia. Methinks I now see her walking in her garden like our first parent, with unaffected charms, before beauty had spectators, and bearing celestial conscious virtue in her aspect. Her countenance is the lively picture

of her mind, which is the seat of honour, truth, compassion, knowledge, and innocence—

“There dwells the scorn of vice, and pity too.

“In the midst of the most ample fortune, and veneration of all that behold and know her, without the least affectation she consults retirement, the contemplation of her own being, and that supreme Power which bestowed it. Without the learning of Schools, or knowledge of a long course of arguments, she goes on in a steady course of uninterrupted piety and virtue, and adds to the severity and privacy of the last age all the freedom and ease of this. The language and mien of a Court she is possessed of in the highest degree; but the simplicity and humble thoughts of a cottage are her more welcome entertainments. Aspasia is a female philosopher, who does not only live up to the resignation of the most retired lives of the ancient sages, but also to the schemes and plans which they thought beautiful, though inimitable. This lady is the most exact economist, without appearing busy; the most strictly virtuous, without tasting the praise of it; and shuns applause with as much industry as others do reproach. This character is so particular, that it will very easily be fixed on her only, by all that know her; but, I daresay, she will be the last that finds it out.

“But, alas! if we have one or two such ladies, how many dozens are there like the restless Poluglossa,

who is acquainted with all the world but herself ; who has the appearance of all, and the possession of no one virtue : she has, indeed, in her practice the absence of vice, but her discourse is the continual history of it, and it is apparent, when she speaks of the criminal gratifications of others, that her innocence is only a restraint, with a certain mixture of envy. She is so perfectly opposite to the character of Aspasia, that as vice is terrible to her only as it is the object of reproach, so virtue is agreeable only as it is attended with applause."

Why such an extremely inappropriate pseudonym as Aspasia should have been applied to the chastest of her sex I am at a loss to understand. But Steele apparently saw nothing incongruous in applying the name of the famous Athenian Hetaira to the object of his admiration. For in a later number of *The Tatler*, discoursing of the difference between Love and Lust, he introduces her as a model representative of the former under the same designation. The passage is a classic one :

"From this idea of a Cupid and a Satyr we may settle our notions of these different desires, and accordingly rank their followers. Aspasia must therefore be allowed to be the first of the beauteous order of Love, whose unaffected freedom, and conscious innocence, give her the attendance of the Graces in all her actions. That awful distance which we bear towards her in all our thoughts of her, and that cheer-

ful familiarity with which we approach her, are certain instances of her being the truest object of love in any of her sex. In this accomplished lady, love is the constant effect, because it is never the design. Yet, though her mien carries much more invitation than command, to behold her is an immediate check to loose behaviour ; and to love her is a liberal education ; for, it being the nature of all love to create an imitation of the beloved person in the lover, a regard for Aspasia naturally produces decency of manners, and good conduct of life in her admirers. If, therefore, the giggling Leucippe could but see her train of fops assembled, and Aspasia move by them, she would be mortified at the veneration with which she is beheld, even by Leucippe's own unthinking equipage, whose passions have long taken leave of their understandings."

At the time when Steele and Congreve penned these eulogies, Lady Elizabeth was mistress of Ledstone Hall, near Pontefract, having succeeded to the property on the death of her brother George, eighth Earl of Huntingdon, in 1704. And there she had commenced that noble life of philanthropy and charity which has made her memory "smell sweet and blossom in the dust."

Beautiful, and charming, and rich, Lady Elizabeth, as may well be supposed, did not lack suitors. She rejected them all, however, for to her the "rose distilled" did not seem even "earthly happier" than—

That which, withering on the virgin thorn,  
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.

"She chose," says Master Thomas Barnard, "to continue in single life upon one or both these considerations, as it is thought, that being sole mistress of her estate, she might see that a wise and religious use was made of it, and probably accounting that single life naturally led to higher perfection."

It was this latter consideration, no doubt, which prompted her to support the scheme of her friend Mary Astell, the much-maligned Newcastle lady whose *Serious Proposal to Ladies: by a Lover of her Sex*, brought down upon her a storm of ribald abuse.

Mrs. Astell held what were then considered advanced and preposterous ideas as to the part which women were designed to play in the world. Her *Serious Proposal* was, in her own words, to "erect a *monastery*, or if you will (to avoid giving offence to the scrupulous and injudicious by names which, though innocent in themselves, have been abused by superstitious practices) we will call it a Religious Retirement, and such as shall have a double aspect, being not only a retreat from the world for those who desire that privilege, but likewise an institution and previous discipline to fit us to do the greatest good in it." There were to be no vows; no restraint was to be put upon ladies to keep them longer than they desired: they were to be free to stay as long or as short a time as they pleased. The cathedral service

of the Church of England was to be daily celebrated, and a special part of the duties of the inmates was to be the strict observance of all the *fasts* of the Church. For the rest, every facility was to be afforded the recluse for improving her mind by study of the sciences and reading of sound secular as well as religious literature.

It does not sound a very revolutionary "proposal" to modern ears, but this scheme of a "Protestant Nunnery," as its enemies persisted in calling it, provoked the bitterest hostility even from men so enlightened as Bishop Burnet.

*The Tailor* attacked it in a most ribald and brutal manner. Mrs. Astell, a woman of the most blameless life and exemplary character, was satirised under the names of Platonne and Madonella, and her proposed "retreat" was held up to ridicule as though it were a second Abbey of Thelema. The journal, which had on its list of contributors the honoured names of Addison, Steele, and Congreve, did not scruple to suggest that Mrs. Astell's "Protestant Nunnery" would become a scene of the grossest immorality, and pictured, with salacious details, the results of a visit of converted rakes of the other sex to "this seat of piety and virginity." A more abominable and disgraceful libel was never published, and one wonders that Addison and Steele, both of whom had a chivalrous respect for womanhood, should have allowed such a cruel and cowardly attack upon a high-minded and virtuous lady to appear in a

journal of which one was the editor and to which the other was a leading contributor.

It is odd that Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal* should have had the warm support of two such very different members of their sex as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lady Elizabeth Hastings. The latter, it is said, was so interested in the scheme that she offered to place £10,000 at Mrs. Astell's disposal to enable her to carry out her project, but withdrew her offer on the urgent remonstrance of Bishop Burnet.

Lady Elizabeth Hastings, however, though "accounting that single life naturally led to higher perfection," was no bigoted celibate, nor did she affect any asceticism in her mode of life. She maintained the state and dignity of an aristocratic English household with strict punctiliousness. Her dress, her equipage, her *ménage* were such as became a lady of high rank and large estate. To quote Master Thomas Barnard :

"And she, besides providing for the order, harmony, and peace of her family, would have great elegance kept in her house and about it, that many of her poor neighbours might not fall into idleness and penury for want of employment ; and she would visit the higher part of the world, lest those that sought after her friendship should complain of her, or fall into uncharitableness to her, or censure her for being supercilious and proud ; and safely might she do this by the strong guard, the vigilance, and circumspection she carried about



her, always with this intention that herself might receive no harm and others, if possible, some good."

It was a well-ordered household, that at Ledstone Hall, for Lady Elizabeth was an admirable woman of business and personally superintended every detail of domestic economy. Her bailiffs and house-servants received their instructions straight from their mistress, who held all the reins of government in her own hand. And what is there more delightful than an establishment presided over by a *châtelaine* who has the sense to see to everything herself, and the gift of instilling into all her dependents her own love of order and her own faultless taste?

Her régime was regarded by her neighbours as a model. She was not only the Lady Bountiful of her own tenants and villagers, but she was the wise counsellor, to whom from far and wide those who needed advice, whether high or low, came to seek for it. For, as her dear friend, the saintly Bishop Wilson of Manx land, said of her, "she was gifted with a right judgment in all things."

The stories told of her charity, benevolence, and generosity were numberless. She made a point of seeking out all her poor relations and bettering their position. To one she made an annual allowance of £500; to another she made a present of £3,000; to a young lady who had lost heavily in the South Sea Bubble she sent 300 guineas, explaining that it was all the ready money she was able to lay her hands upon at

the moment and regretting that it was not more. The fatherless, the widows, the needy, the sick, the maimed and deformed—to these she was as a ministering angel ; and not only was her purse at their disposal, but, what was still more sweet and soothing, her loving and tender sympathy. Where it was possible she visited all the pensioners of her bounty ; and her gracious presence, her beautiful kindly face, her soft sweet voice, brought sunshine and consolation wherever she went. To her servants she was the gentlest, kindest, most considerate, and most liberal of mistresses, and, whilst she exacted perfect obedience and discipline, she let them feel that their welfare was a matter of deep concern to her. It was said of her that “the skill and contrivance of every artificer was used in her house *for the ease of her servants.*” Her care descended to the very cattle—no horses were sleeker and better groomed, no oxen fatter, no cows fuller uddered, no sheep with finer fleece than those of Ledstone Park.

Every day at the Hall was portioned out into periods for devotion, business, refreshment, and recreation. Perhaps the four daily services of prayer and praise might have seemed a somewhat excessive amount of devotional exercise, but herein she followed the practice of the good women of the earlier time. It was thus, for example, that Elizabeth Duchess of York, the mother of Edward IV., parcelled out her diurnal routine, nearly three centuries before. Her usual hour of rising was seven o’clock, when she heard

matins ; she then "made herself ready," or dressed herself for the occupation of the day, and when this was done she had a low mass in her chamber. After this mass, she took something "to recreate nature," which was in fact her breakfast. She then went to chapel and remained at religious service till dinner, which took place "upon eating days" at eleven o'clock and on fasting days at twelve. After dinner the Duchess devoted an hour to give audience to all who had any business with her ; she then slept for a quarter of an hour, and on waking spent her time in prayer until the first peal of evensong (vespers), when "she drank ale and wine at her pleasure." Then she went again to chapel and returned thence to supper at five. After supper she "disposed herself to be familiar with her gentlewomen with honest mirth" ; a much needed human recreation, one would think, after so much drastic religious purgative : one hour before going to bed she took a cup of wine, then "went into her privy closet to pray," and was in bed by eight o'clock.

It was somewhat on these lines that Lady Elizabeth Hastings modelled her daily life. Guests like Bishop Wilson, Archbishop Sharp, William Law, author of *The Serious Call*, and Robert Nelson, the eminent theologian and non-juror, thought her society one of "the sweetest refreshments of life." But visitors of a more worldly cast also found the beautiful *châtelaine* of Ledstone Hall the most charming and attractive

of hostesses. For, though religion was ever first and foremost in her thoughts, she was not such an insatiable devotee as Elizabeth of York ; she shone in general conversation, and her biographer gives us a fascinating sketch of her table-talk.

“ Her great care was that those she conversed with should discern the honour and esteem she bore towards them : to provide that her carriage was such that none should be oppressed or made uneasy at the superiority of her condition : to see that herself failed not in any part of right decorum, that none might think themselves neglected or overlooked by her. . . .

“ At the table, watching that she might not be taken in any of its snares, her countenance was open and serene, her speech soft and musical, her language polite and seasoned with salt, treating of things useful and weighty and bringing out of her rich treasures of wisdom things new and old. Here she displayed all the elegancies of good breeding, addressing herself to all with great meekness and condescension, and adapting herself to their respective talents and capacities ; the rays of her benevolence darted from her own upon every face, and the sweetness of her company was relished in every heart.”

There, it seems to me, you have the picture of a perfect gentlewoman and perfect hostess, which it is impossible to contemplate without pleasure. I am not sure that I would not have patiently endured even the four daily services for the sake of those talks at the table.

But, like many other noble and useful lives, Lady Elizabeth's was not a long one. She was in her fifty-seventh year when a tumour in the breast necessitated an operation. With what marvellous patience and courage she underwent this terrible ordeal let her biographer tell :

"Great skill and wisdom were used in all things ; and every bad event was guarded against : and her hands were held by men of strength : her hands might have been held by a spider's thread : no reluctance did she show, no struggle or contention or even any complaint did she make : only indeed towards the end of this baptism in the wilderness and the sea, she drew such a sigh as any compassionate reader may do to be told this ; though since this was written, (and upon good authority as I thought,) even this small expression of anguish has been denied by a clergyman of great merit, who assisted at the operation, and was one of the number that held her ladyship's hands ; and from his words, which are grave and judicious, one would think that her flesh was quite insensible as her spirit was quite unquenchable."

Let those who prate of "fortitude" in these days of anæsthetics call up the picture of this lady calmly facing the surgeon's knife with nothing to deaden or alleviate the pain, and be silent for very shame.

Lady Elizabeth Hastings recovered from the immediate effects of the operation, but her health was never again what it had been, and about eighteen months

later she died. She was conscious to the last, had all her household servants summoned to her bedside and gave them her last words of comfort and counsel—talked cheerfully to her sorrowing sisters—then, with “eyes bright as diamonds,” strained eagerly to catch the glimpses of golden glory which she said were opening before her—in an ecstasy of beatific vision she passed away.

The beautiful monument in Ledsham Church, here reproduced, represents her with her two half-sisters, Lady Frances and Lady Anna Hastings, standing on either side. Lady Elizabeth’s face is carefully copied from her portrait, and gives some idea of what her loveliness must have been when it evoked the rapturous praise of Steele and Congreve.

## CHAPTER VI

### LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

**I**F ever a scene were calculated to turn the head of a vain and pretty child it was surely that in which little Miss Mary Pierrepont played a prominent part at the early age of eight. A message arrived one day from the Kit Cat Club directing Miss Mary's maid to dress her at once in her best and most becoming frock and ribbons, and escort her forthwith to the Cat and Fiddle, Shire Lane, Temple Bar, where the members of the famous Club were seated in convivial conclave. All the foremost statesmen and wits of the Whig party were "sealed of the tribe" of Christopher Cat, whose mutton pies were unrivalled in Christendom. Marlborough, Walpole, Addison, Steele, Garth, Congreve, Vanbrugh foregathered round that festive board, all pledged to secure the Protestant Succession and maintain the beauty and charms of the Whig ladies against the world. It was a special feature of the Kit Cat Club to give elaborate "toasts" in honour of the ladies of their party, the said toasts being subsequently inscribed on the toasting-glasses dedicated to each



*From an engraving by Caroline Watson, from a miniature.*

LADY MARY PIERREPOINT (1710), AFTERWARDS LADY  
MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU.





beauty. It was the turn of Evelyn Pierrepont (afterwards Marquis of Dorchester and Duke of Kingston) to propose a toast, and he gave his daughter Mary. But as she was unknown to the members of the Club, even by sight, they demurred to "toasting" her. Whereupon the proud father said she should be sent for at once.

When the pretty child, all grandly be-ribboned and be-frilled, arrived, she so charmed them all by her sprightliness and beauty that they not only toasted her with enthusiasm, but by general acclamation elected her a member of the Club. Miss Mary was thoroughly in her element with all these gallant gentlemen—it was a delightful novelty to sit on their knees and to be caressed and complimented and treated with dainty sweetmeats. She never forgot that memorable event, and vowed to the end of her life that it was the happiest hour she had ever spent.

The child is mother to the woman, and that precocious triumph foreshadowed Mary's lifelong ambition. To be the centre of attraction and admiration in a circle of clever and distinguished men, that was her ideal of happiness—and, if the ambition were not created, it was certainly fostered by the flattery and caresses lavished on her that evening by the members of the Kit Cat Club. She had lost her mother when she was but five years of age, and her careless, good-natured father, proud of his daughter's cleverness and prettiness, spoilt her in her

childhood, and let her do much as she pleased. Fortunately she had the saving grace of a love of books. She was an omnivorous reader, but, unlike most of her sex, did not limit her reading to fiction.

"When I was very young," she said, "I was a vast admirer of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and that was one of the chief reasons that set me upon the thoughts of stealing the Latin language. Mr. Wortley was the only person to whom I communicated my design, and he encouraged me in it. I used to study five or six hours a day for two years in my father's library, and so got that language, whilst everybody else thought I was reading nothing but novels and romances."

It is probable that she picked up Greek in the same way, for she does not appear to have had any regular tuition.

Amongst her earliest friends was Anne Wortley, with whom she kept up a constant correspondence. Now, Anne had a brother Edward, "a young man of parts," who had a passion for the classical authors of Greece and Rome. I cannot ascertain when Mary Pierrepont and Edward Wortley first met. Some of her biographers say that she was only fourteen when he first saw her and was struck with her precocity. But it was not until she was at least four years older that there took place the meeting between them at his sister's house, which had so important an effect upon the destinies of both. He was de-

lighted to find a young woman who actually knew something of his favourite authors ; and on discovering that she had never read Quintus Curtius, sent her, a few days later, a superb copy of that author's works, with the following inscription :

Beauty like this had vanquished Persia shown,  
Then Macedon had laid his empire down,  
And polish'd Greece obey'd a barb'rous throne.  
Had wit so bright adorned a Grecian dame,  
The am'rous youth had lost his thirst of fame  
Nor distant Indus sought thro' Syria's plain,  
But to the Muses' stream with her had run,  
And thought her lover more than Ammon's son.

It was not long before he avowed his passion in prose, to which Mary replied in a letter dated March 28th, 1710. "I wish," she says, "I loved you enough to devote myself to be for ever miserable, for the pleasure of a day or two's happiness," and concludes with these words, "I don't enjoin you to burn this letter, I know you will. 'Tis the first I ever writ to one of your sex, and shall be the last. You must never expect another, I resolve against all correspondence of the kind ; my resolutions are seldom made and never broken." When a young lady writes in that strain, one knows what to expect. Those stern resolves were of very perishable stuff. They did not last "a little month" in Mary Pierrepont's case, for her next letter is dated April 25th. She tells her lover, "I can esteem, I can be a friend, but I don't know whether I can love. Expect all

that is complaisant and easy, but never what is fond in me." And mark the worldly wisdom of the following : "When people are tied for life 'tis their mutual interest not to grow weary of one another. If I had all the personal charms that I want, a face is too slight a foundation for happiness. You would soon be tired with seeing every day the same thing. When you saw nothing else you would have leisure to remark all the defects." Could anything be more sensible? It recalls the cynical remark of a celibate nobleman who was asked why he didn't marry. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "fancy having the same face opposite to you at table day after day for perhaps forty years! and a face that was always growing older!" But Mary Pierrepont unfortunately had then a heart as well as a head, and the wisdom of the one was neutralised by the emotions of the other. Love, of course, is blind, and Edward Wortley could not see, what is plain enough to an outsider reading the letters now, that the girl was really in love with him, and that all her sententious philosophy was humbug, a very flimsy mask to conceal her real feelings. But he, stupid as lovers always are, thought she was cold and heartless, and did not care for him. Then came the inevitable tiff. Her coldness had irritated him, and then it was *her* turn to upbraid. "While I foolishly fancied," she wrote on February 26th, 1711, "you loved me (which I confess I had never any great reasons for, more than

that I wished it), there is no condition of life I could not have been happy in with you—so very much I liked you—I may say loved, since it is the last thing I'll ever say to you. . . . I'll never see you more. I shall avoid all public places, and this is the last letter I shall send. If you write be not displeased if I send it back unopened."

Of course he *did* write and the letter was *not* sent back unopened; equally of course, they met and were reconciled, and then, matters having come to a climax, Edward formally proposed for Mary. But the lady's father had no sense of romance—at least not in regard to the marriage of his own daughter, though he made a big enough fool of himself afterwards when he married Lady Bella Bentinck, a beauty young enough almost to have been his granddaughter. It was on the subject of settlements that the Marquis and his daughter's suitor differed. The former insisted upon the estates being entailed upon the eldest son and on the provision of a fixed establishment for his daughter in London. Edward Wortley was on principle opposed to entails, and as neither would give way the matter was at an end. Then the Marquis, exerting his parental right, himself selected a husband for his daughter without consulting her at all upon the subject. She objected to the gentleman, but was sternly told that if she refused to obey her father she would be packed off into the country and cut off with a shilling. She pleaded that she didn't want

to marry at all. "Nonsense!" said her father; "you will do as I bid you without further folly." Then Mary pretended to comply with the paternal wishes. The match was announced, the day was fixed, upwards of £400 had been spent on the wedding trousseau—and then Miss Mary quietly went off and married the man of her own choice. The pair had been plotting for weeks. Here is the last letter Mary Pierrepont wrote before her elopement:

"Reflect now, for the last time, in what manner you must take me. I shall come to you with only a nightgown and a petticoat, and that is all you will get with me. I again beg you to hire a coach to be at the door early Monday morning, to carry us part of our way wherever you resolve our journey shall be. If you determine to go to that lady's house you had better come with a coach and six at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. She and I will be in the balcony that looks on the road; you have nothing to do but to stop under it and we will come down to you. . . . I tremble for what we are doing. Are you sure you will love me for ever? Shall we never repent? I fear and hope. . . . My resolution is taken. Love me and use me well."

There is something very touching and womanly in that last appeal. I wonder whether Edward Wortley ever remembered it and whether it ever sent a pang of remorse to his cankered heart in after-days. He was an insufferable prig and the meanest of misers, but

I suppose he had some human feeling, though it is easy enough to see from his wife's letters that he very soon began to neglect her and that she felt the neglect most bitterly. Her father's rage was furious, and it is said that he never forgave her, though he left her £6,000 in his will. The Countess of Bute, however (Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's eldest daughter), told her daughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, that she remembered once as a little girl being in her mother's dressing-room when there entered an elderly stranger of dignified appearance and still handsome, with an authoritative air as of one who had the right of entry to the house. On seeing him, Lady Mary instantly started up from her toilet table and, all dishevelled as she was, fell on her knees before the stately old gentleman and implored his blessing. It was her father, the Duke of Kingston, and the old custom of asking for the paternal blessing was still revered by Lady Mary. The custom has become obsolete—conceive a modern son or daughter kneeling for the bestowal of such a benediction! It is a question whether parent or child would be more tickled by such a ludicrous display of filial homage.

“Lady Bute,” her daughter tells us, “witnessed the observance of another custom, now obsolete, in the ceremony that her grandfather's widow had to go through soon after his funeral was over. It behoved her to *see company*; that is, receive in person the compliments of condolence which every lady on her Grace's visiting-list was bound to tender, in person



likewise. And this was the established form : the apartments, the staircase, and all that could be seen of the house were hung with black cloth ; the Duchess, closely veiled with crape, sat upright in her state-bed under a high black canopy ; and at the foot of the bed stood ranged, like a row of mutes in a tragedy, the grandchildren of the deceased Duke—Lady Frances Pierrepont, Miss Wortley herself, and Lady Gower's daughters. Profound silence reigned ; the room had no light but from a single wax taper ; and the condoling visitors, who curtsied in and out, approached the bed on tip-toe ; if relations, all, down to the hundredth cousin, in black glove mourning for the occasion."

Blessings on the good sense which put an end to that mockery of woe ! But think what an impression of horror and gloom such a scene must have left on the haunted minds of children ! It may not be wholesome or wise to be "half in love with easeful Death" and "call him soft names in many a musèd rhyme," but surely we are more sensible than our ancestors in striving to invest Death with beauty rather than terror—to garland him with flowers that breathe sweetness and hope, rather than trick him out with all the ghastliest symbols of darkness and despair.

When George I. came to the throne, Edward Wortley, who afterwards added the family name of Montagu to his patronymic, was made a Lord of the Treasury and Lady Mary became a *persona grata* at Court. Both the King and the Prince of Wales

showed her a good deal of attention, and the latter had so little tact as on one occasion to call the Princess of Wales from the card-table to admire Lady Mary's dress ; " Lady Mary always dresses well ! " said the Princess drily, and returned to her cards.

One ludicrous incident which occurred to Lady Mary at Court is worth re-telling. She was very anxious to get away one evening, and enlisted the services of the Duchess of Kendal, the then reigning favourite, to enable her to escape from the King, who was in a talkative mood and very reluctant to part from her. She was tripping down the staircase when she met Secretary Craggs, who asked her where she was going. She told him she had just left the King, who was very much put out at her going away, but she was particularly anxious to get home. Whereupon Craggs, without a word, "snatching her up in his arms as a nurse carries a child, ran full-speed with her upstairs, deposited her within the ante-chamber, kissed both her hands respectfully (still without saying a word) and vanished." The pages, seeing her there, at once ushered her into the King's presence. His Majesty looked up in surprise and pleasure, and cried, "*Ah ! la re-voilà !*" and the Duchess was equally pleased to see her back. Poor Lady Mary, covered with confusion, exclaimed, " Oh ! Lord, Sir, I've been so frightened," and then blurted out the whole story.

She had barely finished when the door opened and in came Craggs, with the usual obeisance and an air

as if nothing had happened. The King, with very red face, said to him indignantly, "Is it the custom of this country to carry about fair ladies like a sack of flour?" Craggs, not dreaming that Lady Mary would have had the impudence or the want of tact to betray him, looked dumfounded for a second, and then bowing low said, "There is nothing I would not do for your Majesty's satisfaction." The King laughed; but when Craggs passed Lady Mary he whispered fiercely in her ear, "You damned tell-tale—I thought you had more sense; I'll pay you out for this some day."

In 1716 her husband was despatched on a special embassy to Constantinople and Lady Mary accompanied him. During her two years' sojourn in the East she wrote most graphic and entertaining letters to her friends—the brightest and most sparkling of all her writings. She dressed in Oriental costume, rose-coloured damask silk trousers, brocaded with silver flowers (far more modest, she says, than the hideous English petticoat), shoes of white kid embroidered with gold, smock of fine white silk gauze edged with embroidery, richly laced scarlet waistcoat, and blue braided jacket. It was generally believed that she obtained entrance to the Sultan's seraglio—but she says herself that she never set foot within the walls of the Sultan's Palace either at Adrianople or Constantinople. She saw and heard a good deal of the Turkish women, however, and was struck with

their beauty, the purity of their complexions—the finest in the world—and the wonderful luxuriance of their hair. But especially she dwells upon their freedom. “Upon the whole,” she writes, “I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire. . . . ’Tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her (so thickly veiled and disguised is she); and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street.”

The Turkish women were dreadfully shocked at her *décolletée* dress, which they thought most immodest. And here is her lively description of the horror excited by her corset :

“One of the highest entertainments in Turkey is having you to their baths ; and when I was introduced to one, the lady of the house came to undress me, which is another high compliment they pay to strangers. After she had slipped off my gown, and saw my stays, she was much struck at the sight of them, and cried out to the other ladies in the bath, ‘Come hither and see how cruelly the poor English ladies are used by their husbands ;—you need boast indeed of the superior liberties allowed you, when they lock you up thus in a box.’ ”

Joseph Spence in his *Anecdotes* tells of another feature of Turkish domestic life which made an impression upon Lady Mary in her Eastern travels.

“It was from the customs of the Turks,” she told

me, "that I first had the thought of a septennial bill for the benefit of married persons, and of the advantages that might arise from our wives having no portions," and he adds—"That lady's little treatise upon these two subjects is very prettily writ, and has very uncommon arguments in it. She is very strong for both those tenets; that all married people should have the liberty of declaring, every seventh year, whether they chose to continue on together in that state for another seven years or not; and that, if women had nothing but their own good qualities and merits to recommend them, it would make them more virtuous and their husbands more happy than they are in the present marketing way among us. She talks of it very seriously, and wished the Legislature would take it under their consideration, and regulate these two points by her system."

Among the many schemes for the emancipation of women, put forward by the present advanced members of the sex, I do not remember to have seen any suggestion of a revival of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's "Septennial Marriage Bill." Yet it is certainly more rational and logical than any other project that has been mooted for the modification of the existing bonds of matrimony.

But the most remarkable result of Lady Mary's Oriental experiences was the firm belief that she imbibed in the virtues of inoculation. At a time when the subject of vaccination is much discussed it may not

be out of place to quote her extraordinary description of inoculation as practised among the Turks.

“Apropos of distempers,” she writes from Constantinople, “I am going to tell you a thing that I am sure will make you wish yourself here. The smallpox, so fatal and so general amongst us, is here entirely harmless by the invention of *ingrafting*, which is the term they give it. There is a set of old women who make it their business to perform the operation every autumn, in the month of September, when the great heat is abated. People send to one another to know if any of their family has a mind to have the smallpox ; they make parties for this purpose, and when they are met (commonly fifteen or sixteen together) the old woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of smallpox and asks what vein you please to have opened—she immediately rips open that you offer to her with a large needle (which gives you no more pain than a common scratch) and puts into the vein as much venom as can lie upon the head of the needle, and after binds up the little wound with a hollow piece of stick. They are in perfect health till the eighth day. Then the fever begins to seize them and they keep their beds two days, very seldom three. They have very rarely above twenty or thirty spots on their faces, which never mark, and in eight days’ time they are as well as before their illness. . . . Every year thousands undergo this operation ; and the French ambassador says pleasantly

that they take the smallpox here by way of diversion, as they take the waters in other countries. There is no example of any one that has died from it; and you may believe I am very well satisfied of the safety of the experiment since I intend to try it on my dear little son.

“I am patriot enough to take pains to bring this useful invention into fashion in England, and I should not fail to write to some of our doctors particularly about it, if I knew of any one of them that I thought had virtue enough to destroy such a considerable branch of their revenue for the good of mankind. But that distemper is too beneficial to them not to expose to all their resentment the hardy wight that should undertake to put an end to it!”

Her apprehension of opposition from the faculty was realised. The medical profession has always been intensely conservative and consequently slow to recognise any novelty in therapeutics, no matter how strong the evidence in its support. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's advocacy of inoculation raised a storm of animosity against her. She was the best-abused woman in England, but she faced her enemies gallantly and stuck to her guns. She had herself been a victim to smallpox, and it was when she was lying ill, with the expectation of being disfigured for life, that she contracted that horror of the disease which made her welcome with enthusiasm what she believed to be an infallible preventive. She was not, however,

severely disfigured, though her granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, says that it "deprived her of very fine eyelashes, the loss of which gave a fierceness to her eyes that impaired their beauty."

The next notable episode in Lady Mary's life was her quarrel with Pope, who, from being one of her most devoted admirers, became suddenly the bitterest and most vindictive of her enemies, and lampooned her in the most foul and brutal manner in his *Satires*. It is not uninteresting to trace this celebrated quarrel to its source : I think it had its origin in the following correspondence. On September 1st, 1718, Pope wrote to Lady Mary (and, by the way, the famous letter is a shameless plagiarism from one written by Gay to him) :

"I have a mind to fill the rest of this paper with an accident that happened just under my eyes, and has made a great impression on me. I have passed part of this summer at an old romantic seat of my Lord Harcourt's, which he lent me. It overlooks a common field, where, under the shade of a haycock, sat two lovers, as constant as ever were found in Romance, beneath a spreading beech. The name of the one (let it sound as it will) was John Hewet, of the other Sarah Drew. John was a well-set man about five-and-twenty ; Sarah a brown woman of about eighteen. John had for several months borne the labour of the day in the same field with Sarah : when she milked, it was his morning and evening charge



to bring the cows to her pail. Their love was the talk, but not the scandal, of the whole neighbourhood ; for all they aimed at was the blameless possession of each other in marriage. It was but this very morning that he had obtained her parents' consent, and it was but till the next week that they were to wait to be happy. Perhaps this very day, in the intervals of their work, they were talking of their wedding clothes, and John was now matching several kinds of poppies and field flowers to her complexion, to make her a present of knots for the day.

“While they were thus employed (it was on the last of July) a terrible storm of thunder and lightning arose, that drove the labourers to what shelter the trees or hedges afforded. Sarah, frightened and out of breath, sank down on a haycock, and John (who never separated from her) sate by her side, having raked two or three heaps together to secure her. Immediately there was heard so loud a crack as if heaven had burst asunder. The labourers, all solicitous for each other's safety, called to one another : those that were nearest our lovers, hearing no answer, stepped to the place where they lay : they first saw a little smoke, and, after, this faithful pair ;—John with one arm about his Sarah's neck, and the other held over her face, as if to screen her from the lightning. They were struck dead, and already grown stiff and cold in this tender posture. There was no mark or discolouring on their bodies, only that Sarah's

eyebrow was a little singed, and a small spot appeared between her breasts. They were buried the next day in one grave, in the parish of Stanton Harcourt, in Oxfordshire ; where my Lord Harcourt, at my request, has erected a monument over them. Of the following epitaphs which I made, the critics have chosen the godly one ; I like neither ; but wish you had been in England to have done this office better ; I think 'twas what you could not have refused me on so moving an occasion.

“When Eastern lovers feed the funeral fire  
On the same pile their faithful fair expire ;  
Here pitying Heav’n that virtue mutual found,  
And blasted both, that it might neither wound.  
Hearts so sincere th’ Almighty saw well pleas’d,  
Sent His own lightning, and the victims seiz’d.

## I.

“Think not by rig’rous judgment seiz’d,  
A pair so faithful could expire ;  
Victims so pure Heav’n saw well pleas’d,  
And snatched them in celestial fire.

## II.

“Live well, and fear no sudden fate ;  
When God calls virtue to the grave,  
Alike ’tis justice, soon or late,  
Mercy alike to kill or save.  
Virtue unmov’d can hear the call,  
And face the flash that melts the ball.

“Upon the whole I can’t think these people unhappy. The greatest happiness, next to living as they would have done, was to die as they did. The greatest honour people of this low degree could have was to

be remembered on a little monument ; unless you will give them another,—that of being honoured by a tear from the finest eyes in the world. I know you have tenderness ; you must have it ; it is the very emanation of good sense and virtue ; the finest minds, like the finest metals, dissolve the easiest.”

Now Lady Mary, as we learn from Dr. Johnson's *Life of Pope*, was always fond of teasing the peevish little poet, and his revelation of himself in a sentimental mood incited her to satire. She thus made fun of a composition on which Pope seriously prided himself—though, as I have said, he stole it from John Gay—and which he expected her to treat in a sympathetic spirit :

“I must applaud your good nature in supposing that your pastoral lovers (vulgarly called haymakers) would have lived in everlasting joy and harmony, if the lightning had not interrupted their scheme of happiness. I see no reason to imagine that John Hughes (*sic*) and Sarah Drew were either wiser or more virtuous than their neighbours. That a well-set man of twenty-five should have a fancy to marry a brown woman of eighteen, is nothing marvellous ; and I cannot help thinking that, had they married, their lives would have passed in the common track with their fellow parishioners. His endeavour to shield her from the storm was a natural action, and what he would have done for his horse, if it had been in the same situation. Neither am I of opinion that

their sudden death was a reward of their mutual virtue. You know the Jews were reprov'd for thinking a village destroyed by fire more wicked than those that had escaped the thunder. Time and chance happen to all men. Since you desire me to try my skill in an epitaph, I think the following lines more just, though not so poetical as yours :

“Here lie John Hughes and Sarah Drew ;  
Perhaps you'll say, what's that to you ?  
Believe me, friend, much may be said  
Of this poor couple that are dead.  
On Sunday next they should have married ;  
But see how oddly things are carried !  
On Thursday last it rain'd and light'n'd ;  
These tender lovers, sadly frighten'd,  
Sheltered beneath the cocking hay,  
In hopes to pass the storm away ;  
But the bold thunder found them out  
(Commission'd for that end, no doubt),  
And seizing on their trembling breath,  
Consign'd them to the shades of death.  
Who knows if 'twas not kindly done ?  
For had they seen the next year's sun,  
A beaten wife and cuckold swain  
Had jointly curs'd the marriage chain ;  
Now they are happy in their doom,  
For P. has wrote upon their tomb.

“I confess these sentiments are not altogether so heroic as yours ; but I hope you will forgive them in favour of the two last lines. You see how much I esteem the honour you have done them ; though I am not very impatient to have the same, and had rather continue to be your stupid living humble servant, than be celebrated by all the pens in Europe.”

Like all satirists, Pope was particularly sensitive to satire, and that mocking letter galled him to the quick. But, though it rankled in his mind, he seems to have so far forgiven Lady Mary as to write to her in friendly strain. Nay, more, he went so far as to make a passionate and serious declaration of love to her. The moment was ill chosen ; and Lady Louisa Stuart in her *Introductory Anecdotes* says that her grandmother, "in spite of her utmost endeavours to be angry and look grave, burst into an immoderate fit of laughter : from which moment he became her implacable enemy." Lady Mary herself says that Addison had long before warned her to leave Pope as soon as she could, else he would play her some devilish trick. And a devilish trick he did play her, for I suppose there is nothing in our language more filthy, cowardly, and malignant than the brutal couplets in which he has satirised Lady Mary as "Sappho."

At the same time Lady Mary was undoubtedly an aggravating person, who could never keep her bitter, mocking tongue under control. Her granddaughter gives the following illustration of Lady Mary's sarcasm :

"The truth is that affectation and folly must be borne with, or at least let alone, if one would go peaceably through this motley world ; which Lady Mary could not expect to do, because she had not Christian patience with either, but attacked and exposed them when they were guiltless of hurting anybody but their owner ; and thus made several mortal enemies

of the vain tribe who would have plumed themselves upon her acquaintance if they could have hoped to escape her animadversions. For example, her former friend, or correspondent, Lady Rich, when become that melancholy thing, a decayed beauty, strove to keep up the appearance of youth by affecting a girlish simplicity, which suited her age much worse than rose-coloured ribands, and served as a constant whetstone to Lady Mary's raillery. The Master of the Rolls happened to be mentioned; the same old Sir Joseph Jekyll 'who never changed his principles or wig,' and who had held the office so long that he was identified with it in every one's mind. 'Pray who is Master of the Rolls?' inquired Lady Rich, in an innocent tone. 'Sir Humphrey Monnoux, madam,' answered Lady Mary, naming off-hand the most unlikely person she could think of. The company laughed, and the lady looked disconcerted; but, not daring to betray her better knowledge by disputing the fact, went on to be more simple still. 'Well! I am vastly ashamed of being so prodigiously ignorant. I daresay I ask a mighty silly question; but pray now, what is it to be Master of the Rolls? What does he do? for I really don't know.' 'Why, madam, he superintends all the French rolls that are baked in London; and without him you would have no bread-and-butter for your breakfast.' There was no parrying this: Lady Rich coloured, flirted her fan, and professed herself unable to cope with Lady

Mary Wortley's wit—*she* had no *wit*. 'Nay,' quoth the ruthless quiz; 'but look you, my dear madam, I grant it a very fine thing to continue always fifteen—that everybody must approve of; it is quite fair; but, indeed, indeed, one need not be five years old.' "

There is hardly a created thing more disagreeable and exasperating than what is commonly known as "a satirical person." And the man or woman who lets his or her sarcastic wit have full play in season and out of season forfeits friendship and has no right to expect love or sympathy from any human being. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lady Mary found herself in her old age friendless, with enemies everywhere, making her the object of their jibes and jeers and jests.

And yet in her time she had had many friends. Among the most sincere, perhaps, was Mary Astell, of whom I have written in my sketch of Lady Elizabeth Hastings. And, in illustration of the depth of their friendship, Lady Louisa Stuart gives the following remarkable anecdote:

"One day, after a serious discussion of some religious subject, very eagerly pursued on Mrs. Astell's side, she paused, and, gazing at Lady Mary with melancholy earnestness, said impressively, "My days are numbered: I am old—that you know; but I now tell you in confidence, I have a mortal disease which must soon bring me to the grave. I go hence, I humbly trust in Christ, to a state of happiness; and, if departed

spirits be permitted to revisit those whom they have loved on earth, remember I make you a solemn promise that mine shall appear to you, and confirm the truth of all I have been saying." Surely a most affecting proof of true and tender friendship, whether the forming such an intention be thought presumptuous or pardonable. A few weeks afterwards she died (of a cancer); but Lady Mary said the "awful apparition never came."

To Lady Mary's friendship with Lord Hervey I shall refer hereafter. Both of them suffered under the lash of Pope's savage satire, and together they endeavoured to pay the satirist out in his own coin. There was not much to choose between the antagonists in the coarseness of their personalities, but Lady Mary and her champion were no match for the Twickenham bard in wit or epigram, though her *Town Eclogues* undoubtedly stung him sharply. When Lord Hervey died his heir sealed up and sent to Lady Mary her letters, with assurances that none of them had been opened. She wrote, thanking him for his honourable conduct, but adding that she could almost regret he had not glanced his eye over a correspondence "which would have shown him, what so young a man might perhaps be inclined to doubt, the possibility of a long and steady friendship subsisting between two persons of different sexes without the least mixture of love."

It is in her letters that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is seen at her best. I do not know any



correspondence that affords more racy reading than hers. There is, it is true, a bitterness and maliciousness about her wit sometimes which give it a pungency as of mustard or aloes—as, for example, when she writes, “It goes far to reconcile me to being a woman, when I reflect that I am in no danger of ever marrying one”; or again, “I own I enjoy vast delight in the folly of mankind; and, God be praised, that is an inexhaustible source of enjoyment.” But I frankly confess to a malign sort of pleasure in such piquant morsels as the following: “As for news, the last wedding is that of Peg Pelham, and I think I have never seen so comfortable a prospect of happiness; according to all appearances she cannot fail of being a widow in six weeks at farthest, and accordingly she has been so good a housewife as to line her wedding clothes with black.”

The Countess of Mar, her sister, to whom the frankest of Lady Mary’s letters are written, complained constantly of low spirits and ultimately lost her mind. Lady Mary, on the contrary, would have nothing to do with the black fiend melancholy. “I wonder,” she says, “you can talk to me of being an old woman: I beg I may hear no more of it. For my part I pretend to be as young as ever, and really am as young as needs be, to all intents and purposes. My cure for lowness of spirits is not drinking nasty water, but galloping all day, and a moderate glass of champagne at night in good company: and I believe this regimen, closely

followed, is one of the most wholesome that can be prescribed."

But even the melancholy Countess of Mar must have been moved to mirth by this mordant sketch of some of the grand ladies at the coronation of George III., written, remember, when Lady Mary was in her seventy-second year :

"I cannot deny but that I was very well diverted on the Coronation Day. I saw the procession much at my ease, in a house which I filled with my own company, and then got into Westminster Hall without trouble, where it was very entertaining to observe the variety of airs that all meant the same thing. The business of every walker there was to conceal vanity and gain admiration. For these purposes some languished and others strutted ; but a visible satisfaction was diffused over every countenance, as soon as the coronet was clapped on the head. But she that drew the greatest number of eyes was indisputably Lady Orkney. She exposed behind, a mixture of fat and wrinkles ; and before, a very considerable protuberance which preceded her. Add to this, the inimitable roll of her eyes, and her grey hairs, which by good fortune stood directly upright, and 'tis impossible to imagine a more delightful spectacle. She had embellished all this with considerable magnificence, which made her look as big again as usual ; and I should have thought her one of the largest things of God's making, if my Lady St. John had not displayed

all her charms in honour of the day. The poor Duchess of Montrose crept along with a dozen of black snakes playing round her face ; and my Lady Portland (who is fallen away since her dismissal from court) represented very finely an Egyptian mummy embroidered over with hieroglyphics. In general I could not perceive but that the old were as well pleased as the young : and I, who dread growing wise more than anything in the world, was overjoyed to find that one can never outlive one's vanity."

That is all very amusing to read, but it must be rather an appalling thought to some of the *grandes dames* who took part in the Coronation of our reigning King, to reflect that possibly some pen as satirical as Lady Mary's has etched their little peculiarities, and that the unflattering portraits may some day be published for the entertainment of an unfeeling posterity.

But Lady Mary's pen was not always dipped in vinegar.

Here, taken at random, is one of the pleasanter pictures in which her letters abound. It is a lively description of her experiences at Brescia during her sojourn in Italy :

"I had a visit in the beginning of these holidays, of thirty horse of ladies and gentlemen, with their servants (by the way, the ladies all ride like the late Duchess of Cleveland). They came with the kind intent of staying with me at least a fortnight, though

I had never seen any of them before ; but they were all neighbours within ten miles round. I could not help entertaining them at supper, and by good luck had a large quantity of game in the house, which, with the help of my poultry, furnished out a plentiful table. I sent for the fiddles, and they were so obliging as to dance all night, and even dine with me next day, though none of them had been in bed ; and were much disappointed I did not press them to stay, it being the fashion to go in troops to one another's houses, hunting and dancing together a month in each castle. I have not yet returned any of their visits, nor do not intend it for some time, to avoid this expensive hospitality. The trouble of it is not very great, they not expecting any ceremony. I left the room about one o'clock, and they continued their ball in the saloon above stairs, without being at all offended at my departure. But the greatest diversion I had was to see a lady of my own age comfortably dancing with her own husband, some years older ; and I can assert that she jumps and gallops with the best of them."

In 1739 Lady Mary went abroad and remained there for two-and-twenty years. No one to this day knows why she thus exiled herself from England. Possibly she and her husband had made up their minds to an amicable separation, and she thought this was the best way of securing their object without public scandal. The reason she herself assigned was that she

had always preferred the Continent to England, and, being tired of waiting for her husband to go with her, had set off alone. But no one took that explanation of her conduct seriously. Scandal would have it that her husband sent her abroad because he had made discoveries detrimental to her character. But there is no evidence that she was ever guilty of anything that merited a harsher term than indiscretion or eccentricity. Horace Walpole saw her at Florence in 1740, and gives this unflattering picture of her: "Lady Mary Wortley is here . . . an object of ridicule to the town. She wears a foul mob (cap) that does not cover her greasy black locks, that hang down never combed or curled, an old mazarine blue wrapper that gapes open and discovers a canvas petticoat. Her face violently swelled—partly covered with plaister, partly with white paint, which for cheapness she has bought so coarse that you would not use it to wash a chimney."

But then Horace hated Lady Mary, and is as little to be trusted for veracity in the portraits he paints of those he dislikes as of those he likes. The one are all black, the other all white. His sketch of her husband, who was then living at Wharncliffe Lodge in Wharncliffe Chase, is equally ill-natured.

"Old Wortley Montagu lives in the very spot where the dragon of Wantley did, only I believe the latter was better lodged: you never saw such a wretched hovel—lean, unpainted, and half its nakedness barely shaded with harateen stretched till it cracks.

Here the miser hoards health and money, his only two objects."

Edward Wortley Montagu died in 1761, and was said to have left one million, three hundred and fifty thousand pounds! The poet Gay, writing to one of his friends, says :

"You see old Wortley Montagu is dead at last, at eighty-three. It was not mere avarice and its companion abstinence that kept him alive so long. He every day drank I think it was half a pint of tokay, which he imported himself from Hungary in greater quantity than he could use, and sold the overplus for any price he chose to set upon it."

Lady Mary returned to England after her husband's death, but did not long survive him. She died, on August 21st, 1762, in her seventy-fourth year, of cancer of the breast. Even Horace Walpole admits that she bore the suffering of that cruel and painful disease with exemplary fortitude and patience. It cannot be said that her life was a happy one ; with a husband from whom she was estranged, and an eldest son whose heartless profligacy and ignoble excesses were a constant source of shame and grief to her, she had nothing to sweeten the bitterness of her lot. A woman who shot the barbed arrows of her keen and sarcastic wit so recklessly could not expect to have friends. Even Pope, before he was her pronounced enemy, complained to Arbuthnot that "she had too much wit for him." And so most persons found who

were brought into contact with her. Yet there were those who classed her among "charming women." Well, charming is a very elastic epithet. In her youth, Lady Mary charmed her contemporaries by her beauty, and in her middle-age by her wit, and she still charms her posterity by her delightful letters—incomparably the wittiest and raciest and most entertaining that ever came from the pen of an Englishwoman. Lady Mary had the charm which extorts admiration, if not that which inspires love.

That she outlived her beauty no one who saw her in her old age would have denied. She was a dis-crowned Queen, a pathetic spectacle to those who are touched by the sight of fallen power and—

grieve when even the Shade  
Of that which once was great, is passed away.

But, for herself, she enjoyed to the last the consoling reflection that she *had* reigned, and that other Queens of Beauty had shared and would share the same inevitable fate. There have been exceptions, however : women whose beauty remained with them long after they had exceeded Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's span. But then they were of kindlier hearts and sweeter tempers than hers. In a later chapter I shall tell the story of two such women, sisters and old maids, who, though their youth glittered with no sparkling triumphs, had yet in compensation—

An old age serene and bright  
And lovely as a Lapland night.



*From an engraving by Heath.*

THE HON. MARY BELLENDEN, AFTERWARDS MRS. CAMPBELL.





*From an engraving by Heath.*

THE HON. MARY BELLENDEN, AFTERWARDS MRS. CAMPBELL.

## CHAPTER VII

### MAIDS OF HONOUR

THACKERAY thought that the England of our great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers must have been a much merrier England than the one in which his own lot was cast. Perhaps it was, but the merriment was of a rude, simple, primitive sort which we, "the heirs of all the ages," regard with pitying contempt. Practical joking was a large ingredient in the fun of that day, and the good sense of society nowadays has branded practical joking as an odious and detestable pastime worthy only of boors. Yet even Maids of Honour indulged in it at the Courts of the First and Second Georges, and it formed apparently the chief outlet for the exuberance of their hoydenish spirits. "The infinite wit and merry pranks of the youthful maids," we read, "vented itself in pulling chairs from under one another and in terrifying their elders by opening and rattling windows in the dead of the night." Very beautiful and very charming some of those Maids of Honour were, but there was a good deal of the tomboy about them. I have selected two—Mary Bellenden and Molly Lepel—whose names have

been immortalised by the greatest wits and poets of their time. I will take Mary Bellenden first.

She was the younger and fairer of the two beautiful daughters of John, Lord Bellenden. Gay, congratulating his friend Pope on the completion of his translation of the *Iliad* in a poem entitled "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece," brackets the two sisters in the following couplet :

Madge Bellenden, the tallest in the land,  
And smiling Mary, soft and fair as down.

An anonymous verse-writer in a ballad made upon the quarrel between George I. and the Prince of Wales, when the Prince and his household were ordered to quit St. James's, gives a less poetical, but probably more accurate, description of the bouncing Mary :

But Bellenden we needs must praise,  
Who, as down the stairs she jumps,  
Sings "Over the hills and far away,"  
Despising doleful dumps.

Mary must have been emphatically "a jolly girl," and jollity no doubt was a very refreshing quality at that dull court. Pope in one of his letters to Martha and Teresa Blount gives an amusing picture of the life of a "Maid of Honour" which makes the conduct of the "romps" more intelligible.

"First, then," he writes, "I went by water to Hampton Court, unattended by any but my own virtues, which were not of so modest a nature as to keep themselves, or me, concealed : for I met the Prince with all

his ladies on horseback, coming from hunting. Mrs. Bellenden and Mrs. Lepel took me into protection (contrary to all the laws against harbouring Papists), and gave me a dinner, with something I liked better, an opportunity of conversing with Mrs. Howard. We all agreed that the life of a Maid of Honour was of all things the most miserable ; and wished that every woman who envied it had a specimen of it. To eat Westphalia ham in a morning, ride over hedges and ditches on borrowed hacks, come home in the heat of the day in a fever, and (what is a hundred times worse) with a red mark on the forehead from an uneasy hat ! All this may qualify them to make excellent wives for fox-hunters, and bear abundance of ruddy-complexioned children. As soon as they can wipe off the sweat of the day, they must simmer an hour, and catch cold in the Princess's apartment : from thence (as Shakespeare has it) *to dinner with what appetite they may*—and after that, till midnight, walk, talk, work, or think, which they please. I can easily believe no lone house in Wales, with a mountain and a rookery, is more contemplative than this court ; and, as a proof of it, I need only tell you that Mrs. Lepel walked with me three or four hours by moonlight, and we met no creature of any quality but the King, who gave audience to the Vice-Chamberlain, all alone, under the garden wall.”

Lord Hervey says that “Miss Bellenden was incontestably the most agreeable, the most insinuating,

and the most likeable woman of the time, made up of every ingredient likely to engage or attract a lover." And yet I have never been able to get rid of the idea that bouncing Mary was a beauty of the milk-maid order, a trifle coarse and not troubled with much sense of delicacy. But she had a woman's proper self-respect and would stand no nonsense even from a Prince. Horace Walpole has left us a sketch of her which practically embodies all that is known of her history and character.

"Her face and person," he says, "were charming; lively she was almost to *étourderie*; and so agreeable she was that I never heard her mentioned afterwards by one of her contemporaries who did not prefer her as the most perfect creature they ever knew. The Prince of Wales frequented the waiting-room, and soon felt a stronger inclination for her than he ever entertained but for his Princess. Miss Bellenden by no means felt a reciprocal passion. The Prince's gallantry was by no means delicate; and his avarice disgusted her. One evening, sitting by her, he took out his purse and counted his money. He repeated the numeration: the giddy Bellenden lost her patience, and cried out, 'Sir, I cannot bear it! if you count your money any more I will go out of the room.' The chink of the gold did not tempt her any more than the person of his Royal Highness. In fact, her heart was engaged; and so the Prince, finding his love fruitless, suspected. He was even so generous as to promise her that if she

would discover the object of her choice, and would engage not to marry without his privity, he would consent to the match, and would be kind to her husband. She gave him the promise he exacted, but without acknowledging the person; and then, lest his Highness should throw any obstacle in the way, married, without his knowledge, Colonel Campbell, one of the Grooms of his Bedchamber, and who long afterwards (1761) succeeded to the title of Argyll, at the death of Duke Archibald. The Prince never forgave the breach of her word; and whenever she went to the Drawing-room, as from her husband's situation she was sometimes obliged to do, though trembling at what she knew she was to undergo, the Prince always stepped up to her, and whispered some very harsh reproach in her ear. Mrs. Howard was the intimate friend of Miss Bellenden; had been the confidante of the Prince's passion; and, on Mrs. Campbell's eclipse, succeeded to her friend's post of favourite—but not to her resistance.”

To Mrs. Howard, afterwards Countess of Suffolk, and *chère amie* of George II. (of whom I have written elsewhere<sup>1</sup>), the kindest and most lovable woman of her time, Mary Bellenden was much attached, and the two kept up a pretty regular correspondence. Mary's letters are characteristic, full of boisterous spirits, with phrases and allusions which would shock modern squeamishness, but were not thought unbe-

<sup>1</sup> *Dainty Dames of Society*, vol. iv.

coming to a lady in days when a spade was called a spade with a vengeance. Here is a specimen of one of Mary's lively letters :

“ COOM-BANK, *April the 10th* [1723].

“How do you do, Mrs. Howard? that is all I have to say—if my brain could have produced anything sooner, you should have heard from me. This afternoon I am taken with a fit of writing; but as to matter, I have nothing better to entertain you with but to tell you the news of my farm. I therefore give you the following list of the stock of eatables that I am fattening for my private tooth. It is well known to the whole county of Kent, that I have four fat calves, two fat hogs fit for killing, twelve promising black pigs, four white sows big with child, for whom I have great compassion, ten young chickens, three fine geese, sitting with thirteen eggs under each (several being duck eggs, else the others do not come to maturity)—all this, with rabbits, and pigeons, and carp, in plenty, beef and mutton at very reasonable rates—(this is writ very even). Now, Mrs. Howard, if you have a mind to stick your knife in anything I have named, say so.

“Nothing has happened here since I came worth mentioning in history, but a bloody retaliation committed on the body of an owl that had destroyed our pigeons.—Adieu, dearest of Swisses !”

“Swiss” was a pet name for Mrs. Howard. Poor prudish John Wilson Croker, who had a good deal of the old maid about him, is much exercised in his mind and greatly shocked by the coarseness and indelicacy of Mary’s expressions in her letters to her friend ; and in his editorial notes to *The Correspondence of the Countess of Suffolk* he is constantly holding up his hands in horror, so to speak, as he comments upon these “dreadful blemishes.” But there really is nothing very shocking in them, and nothing very different, I daresay, from the confidential letters which ladies of fashion write to one another nowadays. There are certain words and phrases, now prudishly relegated to the vocabulary of school-boys and the “common people,” which Mary Bellenden did not scruple to use both in writing and speaking ; but there were greater ladies than she, Queen Caroline herself, for example, and Jane, Duchess of Gordon, who were far coarser in their language.

Mary Bellenden, transformed into Mrs. Campbell, seems to have had a happy married life. Four sons and a daughter she bore to her husband, who was not only a gallant and distinguished soldier, but a man of fine character. The daughter, Caroline, married as her first husband the Earl of Aylesbury, and as her second, Horace Walpole’s bosom friend, Marshal Conway. The sons were of no particular account. Mrs. Campbell was appointed housekeeper of Somerset House, and died there on December 18th, 1736, before she



had reached her fortieth year. Five-and-twenty years after her death, her husband, who had not married again, succeeded to the Dukedom of Argyll, and died in 1770. He was constant to the memory of the beautiful woman who had married him when he was a poor man, with no prospect of a title, though she might, had she chosen, have had the pick of the richest and noblest. Women of the Mary Bellenden type often make the best wives. Virtue not uncommonly goes with coarseness of speech and indelicacy of manners, and the hoyden frequently develops into the loving helpmate and the model housewife. It was so, at any rate, in Mary Bellenden's case, and it is impossible, as one reads of her in the letters of Pope and Walpole, not to have a kindly feeling for her. With all her bouncing ways, she is genuine, hearty, sincere—she carries a breezy unconventionality with her wherever she goes, and, like Milton's cheerful Nymph, she brings with her a smack of "jest and youthful jollity." It is not surprising, therefore, that the dull and jaded courtiers of the dreariest Royal Household in Europe found her high animal spirits charming and refreshing.

Of her rival in beauty, Molly Lepel, there is much more to tell. For Molly had wit, brains, education, and a polish utterly lacking in Mary Bellenden—she could hold her own in the society of the cleverest and wittiest men and women of her time, and numbered among her friends and admirers some of the first intellects in Europe.



*From an engraving by W. Greathack  
after a miniature formerly at Strawberry Hill.*

MOLLY LEPEL LADY HERVEY.



It has been stated by John Wilson Croker, and others whom he has misled, that Mary Lepel belonged to the family of that name, who had long been the proprietors of the Island of Sark, and that, as the inhabitants of that little isle are more French than English, this accounted for the lady's partiality for French society and manners. Croker had discovered a notice, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, of a Mr. Nicholas Lepell of Sark, and as Mary's father was named Nicholas, he jumped to the conclusion that the two were identical. But Mary had no connection with the Lepells of Sark. Her family, the Von Lepels (with one l), came originally from Pomerania. Her father, who had dropped the "Von," came over to England as page of honour to George of Denmark, consort of Queen Anne, was married to an English lady in 1698, became a naturalised Englishman in 1699, received a commission to raise a regiment of foot for the British Army in 1705, and was made a brigadier-general in 1710.

Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in one of her letters to Lord Stair, states that Mary's father obtained for her a cornetcy of horse before she was born, and that, as he never disclosed the error in sex, she drew the pay for many years after she was a Maid of Honour, till "my Lord Sunderland got her a pension of the late king (George I.), it being too ridiculous to continue her any longer an officer in the Army."

Molly Lepel, as she was generally called, became a

Maid of Honour, it is said, at the age of fourteen, but there seems more reason to suppose that she was really sixteen. The Duchess of Marlborough, in a letter from which I have already quoted, says, "she was extremely pert and forward," but then, Sarah never forgave Molly for her marriage, and was spiteful in consequence.

Few men have excited such feelings of hatred and contempt amongst their contemporaries as John, Lord Hervey, who married Molly Lepel. He was plain Mr. Hervey when he became the husband of the Court beauty, and had certainly then personal attractions which might well appeal to a girl of Molly Lepel's refined and cultured tastes. John Hervey was a perfect gentleman, with a natural grace and courtesy which had been perfected by his French training. His face was singularly handsome, though effeminate, his figure was elegant, and he knew how to dress. His dainty ruffles, his flowing peruke, the diamond buttons in his fine strawberry-coloured coat were all worn with the easy air of a man who knows that he sets off his dress quite as much as his dress sets off him. Molly Lepel liked a perfect gentleman, and here she had one finished to the finger-tips—a man of wit and culture too, who could appreciate her own sparkling intellectual gifts. She had also another and a more distinguished suitor at that time, in the person of Sir Robert Walpole. But Sir Robert was a coarse, hard-drinking, hard-riding, fox-hunting squire, who

was more at home boozing with boors than playing the gallant with ladies—moreover, he was known to have treated his beautiful wife, Catherine Shorter, shamefully, and to have shortened her life by his brutality—and, to crown all, he was close upon forty. So Molly would have none of him, but gave her heart and hand to John Hervey. William Pulteney (afterwards Earl of Bath) and Lord Chesterfield celebrated the event in a joint ballad, in imitation of a very popular one, said to have been composed by Pope, Swift, and Gay, upon Molly Mogg, “The Fair Maid” of the Rose Inn, at the little Berkshire village of Oakingham. Pulteney’s and Chesterfield’s production has as little wit as decency, but I quote the following stanza as proof that, so far as good looks were concerned, John Hervey was considered no ill-mate even for the charming Molly :

For Venus had never seen bedded  
 So perfect a beau and a belle,  
 As when Hervey the handsome was wedded  
 To the beautiful Molly Lepel.

Hervey was early known at Court as “Lord Fanny,” from that effeminacy to which I have already referred, but at this time he was certainly not the loathsome and odious creature that Pope and his other enemies subsequently depicted him. Old Duchess Sarah hated him with a bitterness characteristic of her. She declares, in one of her letters to Lord Stair, that he encouraged his beautiful wife, whom George I. was very fond

of talking with, to make a deliberate attempt to supplant the Duchess of Kendal as the king's mistress, and that "She went to the drawing-room every night and publicly attacked his Majesty in the most vehement manner, insomuch that it was the diversion of all the town ; which alarmed the Duchess of Kendal, and the Ministry that governed her, to that degree, lest the king should be put in the opposers' hands, that they determined to buy my Lady H—— off ; and they gave her £4,000 to desist, which she did, and my Lord Fanny bought a good house with it, and furnished it very well."

But I refuse to credit that statement. Sarah was so bitter and vindictive that she would not stick at any slander which might blacken the character of one she hated, and there is no other evidence than her own word in support of a charge which is utterly inconsistent with Molly Lepel's character, as we have it revealed to us in her own letters and in the tributes paid to her by men and women the sincerity of whose praise is above suspicion.

At a later period the old termagant described Lord Hervey thus : "He has certainly parts and wit, but is the most wretched profligate man that ever was born, besides ridiculous ; a painted face and not a tooth in his head." It was said that he lived solely on asses' milk and flour biscuits, a point out of which Pope makes capital in his savage satire. Here is the passage from the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" in which Pope,

after his quarrel with Hervey, spat his venom upon him :

Let Sporus tremble.

A. What that thing of silk,  
Sporus, that mere white curd of asses' milk ?  
Satire or sense, alas ! can Sporus feel ?  
Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel ?  
P. Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,  
This painted child of dirt that stinks and stings ;  
Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,  
Yet wit ne'er tastes, and beauty ne'er enjoys :  
So well-bred spaniels civilly delight  
In mumbling of the game they dare not bite.  
Eternal smiles his emptiness betray,  
As shallow streams run dimpling all the way ;  
Whether in florid impotence he speaks,  
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppet squeaks ;  
Or at the ear of Eve, familiar toad,  
Half froth, half venom, spits himself abroad,  
In puns, or politics, or tales, or lies,  
Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies ;  
His wit all see-saw between *that* and *this*,  
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,  
And he himself one vile antithesis.  
Amphibious thing ! that acting either part,  
The trifling head or the corrupted heart ;  
Fop at the toilet, flatterer at the board,  
Now trips a lady, and now struts a lord.  
Eve's tempter thus the Rabbins have expressed,  
A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest.  
Beauty that shocks you, parts that none will trust,  
Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust.

That is the famous piece of satire, the concentrated malignity of which has, I suppose, never been surpassed. What a venomous little viper he was, that bard of Twickenham ! It seems to me that the simile of the toad befits himself far more than the subject of his



satire, and that devilish is the only epithet justly descriptive of the malice of those lines.

But Hervey, too, must have been a repulsive creature in his later days. Even Lord Hales, his apologist, admits that he used to paint "to soften his ghastly appearance." The unfortunate man, however, had been subject to epileptic fits from his youth and was compelled to adopt the most abstemious diet. At one time he drank tea to excess, "that detestable and poisonous plant," as his father Lord Bristol called it, "which has once brought you to death's door and if persisted in will carry you through it."

Writing to his physician, Cheyne, the celebrated vegetarian, Hervey tells him that he "never takes wine or malt drink, only water and mild tea—two days a week he ventures on the tender white meat of a chicken for dinner : for breakfast dry biscuit and green tea—for supper bread and water—no butter and no salt." How could a man subsisting on such a diet look otherwise than ghastly ! His terror of the fits was always haunting him. On one occasion he was attacked in the streets, and he was ever after in such dread of a similar sudden seizure that he hardly dared to venture out alone. For a man so afflicted it is only charitable to make allowances. But epilepsy is no excuse for profligacy, and profligate Lord Hervey undoubtedly was. His wife seems to have looked leniently on his infidelities, and to have been sincerely attached to him to the very end. And

he, if one may judge from some verses addressed to her near the close of his life, had a tenderer feeling for her than one would have given him credit for cherishing.

That he was an attractive man, for all his ghastly appearance, is proved not only by his winning the beautiful Molly Lepel, but by his captivating the affections of the Princess Caroline, who was, Horace Walpole says, "overwhelmed at his death," and even making an impression on the heart of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, when she was not far short of fifty.

But to come back from the husband to the wife. Even *his* bitterest enemies always exempted *her* from their satire. Pope himself retained his admiration for her, and in his long and rancorous letter to Lord Hervey pays this tribute to Lady Hervey: "Her merit, beauty, and vivacity will, if transmitted to your posterity, be a better present than even the noble blood they derive only from you."

One of Lady Hervey's warmest admirers was Voltaire. During his sojourn of two years and eight months in England, on which Mr. Churton Collins in his admirable essay has thrown so much fresh light, "the brilliant Frenchman" saw much to admire. He was particularly struck with "the skill with which the young women managed their horses, with the freshness and beauty of their complexions, the neatness of their dress, and the graceful vivacity

of their movements." It is refreshing to find the greatest Frenchman of his age extolling England as "a paradise where the women are always beautiful and animated, where the sky is always clear, and where no one thinks of anything but pleasure." One rubs one's eyes on reading that eulogy, and suspects the presence of irony. But no! Voltaire was genuinely "enchanted," to use his own word, with England—as some eminent Frenchmen of quite recent date have also been. And of all "the beautiful and animated" women, he admired none more than Mary, Lady Hervey. It was to her that he addressed the only verses that he ever composed in our language, which for that reason, not for any intrinsic merit, are worth reproducing here.

Hervey, would you know the passion  
You have kindled in my breast?  
Trifling is the inclination  
That by words can be express'd.

In my silence see the lover—  
True love is best by silence known :  
In my eyes you'll best discover  
All the power of your own.

"A curious fortune," says Mr. Churton Collins, "attended these verses. They were subsequently transcribed and addressed to a lady named Laura Harley—the wife of a London merchant—by one of her gallants, and they formed part of the evidence on which her husband founded his claim for a divorce."

Another of the lady's eulogists is Lord Chesterfield.

"Lady Hervey," he writes in one of his letters to his son, "has been bred all her life in Courts, of which she has acquired all the good breeding and politeness without the frivolousness. She has all the reading that any woman should have, and more than any woman need have : for she understands Latin perfectly well, though she wisely conceals it. . . . No woman ever had more than she has *le ton de la parfaitement bonne compagnie, les manières engageantes, et le je ne sais quoi que plaît.*"

And the strange thing was that, with all these charms and graces, Lady Hervey won the admiration and esteem of her own sex. Even Mary Wortley Montagu's bitter tongue and pen spared "the beautiful Molly Lepel," and though she declared that the world consisted of "men, women, and Herveys," and waxed sarcastic upon the peculiarities of that distinctive breed of mortals—she had a good word for the charming lady who brought up so admirably a large family of troublesome children (and Herveys, too)! Lady Wortley Montagu's estimate of Lady Hervey is thus echoed by her grand-daughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, daughter of the Countess of Bute.

"That *dessous des cartes*, which Madame de Sevigné advises us to peep at, would here have betrayed that Lord and Lady Hervey had lived together upon very amicable terms, 'as well bred as if not married

at all,' according to the demands of Mrs. Millamant in the play ; but without any strong sympathies, and more like a French couple than an English one. It might be from suspecting this state of things that his avowed enemies, Pope for one, went out of their way to compliment and eulogise her. However, their praises were not unmerited ; by the attractions she retained in age, she must have been singularly captivating when young, gay, and handsome ; and never was there so perfect a model of the finely polished, highly bred, genuine woman of fashion. Her manners had a foreign tinge, which some called affected : but they were gentle, easy, dignified, and altogether exquisitely pleasing. One circumstance will excite surprise : notwithstanding her close connection with the old Court, she was, at heart and in opinion, a zealous Jacobite ; hardly, perhaps, to the pitch of wishing the Pretender's enterprise success, yet enough to take fire in defence of James II. if ever she heard any blame laid to his charge."

A more sincere friend and admirer of Lady Hervey was Lady Suffolk, "the good Howard." They were constant correspondents, and from Lady Hervey's letters I will select this as a specimen of her gay and lively style :

"BATH, *June 7th*, 1725.

"Though very likely you did neither expect nor desire to hear from me, yet I fancy you will not be much surprised at doing so : for it is very natural

for any one that once has had the pleasure of corresponding with dear Mrs. Howard to endeavour to continue it. I cannot give you much encouragement to let me hear from you, unless the assuring you it will be a great pleasure to me to do so will be any; for I can promise you nothing in return, this place not being able to afford either news or entertainment—not that it is so very empty as I had heard; and really a great part of the company are of one's acquaintance, though I cannot say of quite the most agreeable part of it.

“We had a breakfast on Saturday, given by Mr. Byng, at which I believe there were fifty or three-score people. Sir Richard Grosvenor gives one to-morrow. At night we have constantly four or five tables at cards; and hazard has not failed once: so that, take it altogether, we make a pretty sort of a show for the time of year. I do not know what weather it is in town, but here it is very agreeable to the water-drinkers, but very little so to the rest of the company. Lord Peterborough is here, and has been so for some time, though by his dress one would believe he had not designed to make any stay; for he wears boots all day, and, as I hear, must do so, having brought no shoes with him. It is a comical sight to see him with his blue ribbon and star, and a cabbage under each arm, or a chicken in his hand, which, after he himself has purchased at market, he carries home for his dinner.”

And this, remember, was Charles Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough, the most brilliant and dashing soldier of his time, the hero of a thousand romantic adventures in love and war, the last of the knights errant ! “To what base uses we may return, Horatio !”

Lord Hervey died in 1743, and Lady Hervey, writing shortly afterwards to one of her friends, thus expressed her philosophical resignation : “I see and feel the greatness of this last misfortune in every light, but I will struggle to the utmost ; and though I know, at least I think, I can never be happy again, yet I will be as little miserable as possible, and will make use of the reason I have to soften, not to aggravate, my affliction.”

From that time, though she was often in London and received her friends in her town house, she went little into society, but passed most of her time in seclusion at her beautiful country seat, Ickworth Park. In one of her letters to the Rev. Edward Morris, who had been tutor to her sons, she gives this pretty glimpse of herself and her occupations. Modern rose-growers will smile at her *fifty* sorts of roses, as they think of the hundreds of varieties in their bulky catalogues. “I wish you could come and see my garden ; you who remember what it was. I have made a rosery ; perhaps you will ask what that is : it is a collection of all the sorts of roses there are, which amount to fifty ! This rosery perhaps may bring me to an untimely end, but it is a very pretty thing :

I have made the whole design of it myself. In the middle of it, raised above all the others, is one of the most *beautiful kind*, who, conscious of the right to possess that place, does not blush at doing so."

During the last few years of her life she was a martyr to gout and rheumatism, but bore her sufferings with heroic patience and cheerfulness. In the last letter she ever wrote Lady Hervey takes the same philosophic view of death that she took of all "the natural shocks that flesh is heir to." "What you seem most to apprehend," she writes to the Rev. Edward Morris, "is not the subject of horror to me. 'Tis not *death* that I fear, but it is the way to it : it's the struggles, the last convulsions that I dread : for when once they are over, I don't question but to rise to a new and better life. Dr. Garth, I remember, used to say, 'I vow to God, Madam, I take *this* to be *hell*—purgatory, at least ; we shall certainly be better off in any other world.' I think I am of his opinion."

A few weeks later, on September 2nd, 1768, she died. "I have had another misfortune," writes Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann on the 22nd of the same month, "as I had last year in poor Lady Suffolk. My Lady Hervey, one of my great friends, died in my absence. She is a great loss to several persons : her house was one of the most agreeable in London ; and her own friendliness, good breeding, and amiable temper, had attached all that knew her. Her sufferings, with the gout and rheumatism, were terrible,



and yet never could affect her patience or divert her attention from her friends."

Only one of Lady Hervey's eight daughters, Caroline, the youngest, appears to have inherited her mother's charms in any remarkable degree, and she died unmarried. She must have been a singularly charming woman to have won from Charles Churchill, a satirist not given to eulogy, this glowing tribute to her merits :

That face, that form, that dignity, that ease,  
Those powers of pleasing, with that will to please,  
By which Lepel, when in her youthful days,  
Ev'n from the currish Pope extorted praise,  
We see transmitted in her daughter shine,  
And view a new Lepel in Caroline.

The two Maids of Honour, whose careers I have sketched, had birth and position to blazon their charms with bold advertisement. But beauty can assert its claims without any such adventitious aids, and never was there a more signal proof of the powerlessness of circumstances to hide or dim "the light that lies in woman's eyes" than that afforded by the two penniless Irish adventuresses whose romance forms the subject of my next chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### "THE GODDESSES"

ARE we less susceptible to woman's beauty than our forefathers? Or are the women of to-day less beautiful than their great-grandmothers? The alternative question puts itself irresistibly to me after studying the history of the Gunnings. It is inconceivable that society of all grades should go mad over the beauty of any woman nowadays as it did over that of these two Irish adventuresses a hundred and fifty years ago. There was not more enthusiasm expended over Mr. Gladstone at the zenith of his political fame than over these two famous beauties. Crowds waited daily outside their houses to see them come out. They were mobbed by hundreds of frantic sightseers wherever they went. When they travelled through the country, people waited by scores all night outside posting-inns to see them get into their chaises in the morning. An enterprising Worcester shoemaker cleared two and a half guineas in a single day by exhibiting at a penny a head the shoes which he had been commissioned to make for one of the "goddesses," as Mrs. Montague dubbed them. When they went to the theatre every

seat in the house was taken and money was turned away from the doors. At the words, "The Gunnings are coming," old fogies left book or wine or card-table and rushed to the club windows—whilst the younger members dashed bare-headed into the streets to get a nearer view of the divinities.

It would be ungallant to suggest that there are not as lovely women to be found in the British Isles in the twentieth century as there were in the eighteenth, and yet what fashionable beauty has there been within living memory who could command anything like such universal and enthusiastic homage as the Gunnings did? I can only conclude, therefore, that men, Englishmen at any rate, are not so susceptible to the charms of feminine beauty as they were, or that they are less demonstrative in showing their admiration. For the *furor* created by the Gunnings was not altogether exceptional. As I have pointed out elsewhere, Madame Récamier created almost as great a sensation when she came over on her brief visit to London in 1802. Clearly, then, Englishmen in the mass do not display the same sensitiveness to the influence of beauty which they once did. Perhaps they see so much of it in the photographers' shops that they are surfeited, or so little of it in the portraits of fashionable ladies at the Royal Academy that they do not believe it exists. But enough of speculation and discussion. Let me tell briefly the story of the two Irishwomen, who, by sheer force of their beauty, took London by storm and



*From a mezzotint engraving by J. Finlayson, after a painting by C. Read.*

MARIA GUNNING, AFTERWARDS COUNTESS OF COVENTRY.



brought every man they met, from the King downwards, grovelling in homage at their feet.

It was a squalid and slatternly home in which the two girls were brought up. Their father, John Gunning, was a typical Irish squireen, a hard-riding, hard-drinking sportsman, up to his eyes in debt, and utterly careless of the comfort or welfare of his wife and family. He appears to have been a gentleman by birth, and claimed kinship with the Gunnings of Kent, one of whom, Peter, was a distinguished bishop of Chichester in the seventeenth century. Mrs. Gunning was the youngest daughter of Theobald, Viscount Mayo, so that there was "blood" in the family, a fact of which, after the fashion of impecunious gentility, they made the most. John Gunning had a dilapidated property in county Roscommon, with the imposing title of Castle Coote (a name delightfully suggestive of "Castle Costigan, County Mayo, me boy"), but his ambitious wife, with four lovely daughters and a son to provide for, saw little prospect of bettering their condition in the wilds of Roscommon, and persuaded her husband to migrate to Dublin, where there was some chance of her daughters attracting attention by their beauty and winning a prize in the matrimonial lottery. To Dublin, then, the whole family came.

But fortune did not smile upon them, and they were in the last straits of poverty when George Anne Bellamy appeared upon the scene as the fairy godmother

to make everything pleasant. It is the habit of reputable chroniclers, especially of her own sex, to leave George Anne Bellamy severely alone—to pass her by,

Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern  
From her false friend's approach in Hades turn.

She would have been the delight of Ibsenites, had there been any such in her day, and indeed I wonder that none of our latter-day dramatists has made her the heroine of a sexual play, and that no daring novelist has exploited her as a magnificent example of the "*Woman who did*."

But, though her amours were scandalous, she was a brilliant actress and a kind-hearted woman. At the time the Gunnings came to Dublin, she was the most popular member of the company which Thomas Sheridan, the father of Richard Brinsley, was running at his two theatres in Smock Alley and Aungier Street.

It is thus that George Anne Bellamy, in her voluminous memoirs, gives the account of her first meeting with the Gunnings :

"As I was returning one day from rehearsal, at the bottom of Britain Street, I heard the voice of distress. Yielding to an impulse of humanity, I overleaped the bounds of good breeding, and entered the house from whence it proceeded. When I had done this, led by an irresistible attraction, I entered without ceremony the parlour, the door of which appeared to be guarded by persons not at all suited to those within. I here found a woman of a most elegant figure, surrounded

by four most beautiful girls, and a sweet boy of about three years of age. After making the necessary apologies for my abrupt intrusion, I informed the lady that, as the lamentations of her little family had reached my ears as I passed by, I had taken the liberty of a neighbour to inquire if I could render any assistance.

“Mrs. Gunning (for that was the lady’s name) arose immediately from her seat, and calling me by my name, thanked me for the offer of my assistance, complimenting me at the same time upon possessing such humane sensations. She then informed me that, having lived beyond their means, her husband had been obliged to retire into the country to avoid the disagreeable consequences that must ensue. That she had been in hopes that her brother, Lord Mayo, listening to the dictates of fraternal affection, would not suffer a sister and her family to be reduced to distress; but that his Lordship remained inflexible to her repeated solicitations. The ill-looking men I now found had entered the house by virtue of execution, and were preparing to throw her and her children out of doors.

“Upon this, Mrs. Gunning and myself went upstairs to consult what was best to be done in so disagreeable a predicament. We there determined that I should return home, and send my man-servant, who was to wait under the window of the drawing-room, in the evening, and bring to my house anything that could be thrown to him. It was further agreed that as my mother and I had more room than we could con-



veniently occupy, the children and their servant should remain with us, whilst she went to her husband to assist him in settling his affairs. The whole of our plan being carried into execution, *Miss Burke*, *Mrs. Gunning's sister*, a lady of exemplary piety, who had passed her probation in the community of Channel-Row, sent shortly after for the two youngest girls, and the two eldest were permitted, to my great pleasure, to remain at our house. Notwithstanding my mother was a great economist, ever since we resided at Summer-Hill she had hired a job coach. And of this we now found the convenience ; as it enabled us to take our two lovely guests about with us."

It was while the two elder Gunnings were living with the good-natured actress that an adventure befell them which is said to have greatly impressed both of them. Fortune-telling was as fashionable then as it is now, though the fortune-tellers did not reap such a golden harvest from the timid credulity of the eighteenth century as they do from the robuster superstition of the twentieth. There was then in Capel Street, Dublin, a female fortune-teller who was in great repute. To this august prophetess George Anne Bellamy went with her two young friends. The sibyl appeared in awe-inspiring guise, with all the usual "properties" ; a darkened room, a muffled visage—everything that was calculated to provoke a weird and creepy sensation. The two Gunnings were the first to have their fortunes told. Maria, the eldest, was

informed that her destiny was to marry an earl, and to be loved exceedingly. Elizabeth was to marry two dukes in succession. In order to test the prophetess, George Anne Bellamy slipped on a wedding-ring when it came to her turn to have her palm examined. The indignant sorceress detected the imposture at once; flinging the actress's hand scornfully from her, she exclaimed in an awful voice: “Take that ring off. You have never been married and never will be.” Then, bending forward, she whispered some words in George Anne's ear which made even that bold woman look scared. There is, unfortunately, no evidence to show that this wonderful story was not trumped up after the sisters Gunning had attained their notoriety, but as it is one of the legends surrounding the story of the two beauties, I give it for what it is worth.

It is said that Mrs. Gunning at this time seriously contemplated utilising her friendship with George Anne Bellamy to place her two daughters on the stage, in despair of finding any other mode of procuring publicity for their charms. But a better way out of the difficulty presented itself. The scheming and resourceful mother succeeded in obtaining tickets for the grand Birthday Ball at the Castle, given in honour of the King. Ball dresses were lent to the two girls for the occasion either by Sheridan or Peg Woffington, it is not certain which, and they started off on their career of conquest. Their success was unqualified. Every one was struck by their dazzling beauty. The kindly

viceroi, Lord Harrington, was completely vanquished, and took the warmest interest in the two beautiful *débutantes*. He went out of his way to obtain a grant of £150 from the Irish Establishment Fund for Mrs. Gunning, and strongly advised her to take her daughters to London, at the same time offering to give her introductions there. So the Gunning family left Ireland to seek their fortunes in London.

Apart from their beauty, the girls were slenderly equipped with the means to hold their own in good society. Their manners were vulgar, and how shamefully their education had been neglected may be gathered from the spelling and style of the following letter written by Maria, the future wearer of an English coronet, to her then best friend, George Anne Bellamy :

"I receaved my dearest Miss Bellamy letter at last ; after her long silence, indeed I was very jealous with you, but you makes me *amen's* in Letting me hear from you now. it gives me great joy and all our *faimley* to hear that yr Dear mama and your Dearest self are in perfect health to be sure that yr Relations where fighting to see which of them shod have you last and Longest with y<sup>m</sup>. . . I am very unfortunate to be in the country when our Vaux Hall was. If I was in town I shod be thear and I believe I should be much more delighted than at a publicker diversion. . . . I don't believe it was Mr. Knox you read of at Bath for he is hear. Dublin is the stupites place. . . . I believe

Sheredian can get no one to play with him is doing all he can to get frinds for him sef to be sure you have hread he is marrd for sirtain to Miss Chamberlan—a sweet pare.

“I must bid a due and shall only say I am my D<sup>r</sup> your ever affecnat

“M. GUNNING.”

But beauty, like love, is, as Naomi Tighe remarks in *School*, “superior to orthography.” And indeed, nine-tenths of the English aristocracy of both sexes were at that time notoriously defective in their spelling, though probably not to the extent that Maria Gunning was.

It was in the spring of 1751 that the Gunnings arrived in London, and the clever, pushing mother did not let the grass grow under her feet. She made good use of her introductions and paraded her daughters in every public place where they were likely to attract attention. Maria was then nineteen and Elizabeth eighteen, and before the summer was half over their beauty was the talk of the town. I find Horace Walpole, whom the minutest item of gossip could not escape, writing to his crony, Sir Horace Mann, on June 18th, 1751, thus :

“These are two Irish girls of no fortune, who are declared the handsomest women alive. I think there being *two* so handsome and both such perfect figures is their chief excellence, for singly I have seen much

handsomer women than either ; however, they can't walk in the park or go to Vauxhall, but such mobs follow them that they are generally driven away."

Mrs. Delany, too, who was as keen, though not as cynical, a gossip as Horace, writing about the same time to her friend, Mrs. Dewes, has a word to say about the two Irish beauties. "All you have heard of the Gunnings *is true*, except their having a fortune, but I am afraid they have a *greater* want than that, which is *discretion*."

As a matter of fact, the pair of adventuresses did *not* lack discretion. Their artful mother took care of that. She knew exactly how far they might go without risking their chances of marrying well. The girls themselves conveyed to most people the idea of being simple and unsophisticated, but they had been thoroughly coached in their parts, and their mother was always at hand to give them the cue. What a clever woman she was to be sure ! and how utterly unscrupulous ! It was quite as much to her artful planning as to their own charms that her daughters owed their success. Amongst the crowd of suitors, the bulk of them probably with distinctly dishonourable intentions, two at last singled themselves out from the rest. The one was the sober-minded Earl of Coventry, who hung about Maria in the most exasperating manner without making any definite declaration of his passion ; the other was that wild rake the Duke of Hamilton, who was madly in love with Elizabeth.

Of these Mrs. Gunning saw that Lord Coventry was the more difficult fish to hook, but she was determined to have him. She “threw her daughter at his head” in the most shameless fashion. Maria had her orders and acted up to them. She lured Lord Coventry to her side, raked him with the batteries of her fine eyes, did all in her power to compromise him and bring him to the point, but in vain. Lord Chesterfield, writing to Solomon Dayrolles on November 15th, 1751, and referring to the opening of Parliament, says : “Lord Coventry, who moved the address in our House, did it well enough, though agitated by the two strong passions of fear and love, Miss Gunning being seated on one side of him and the House on the other. Her mother told Lord Granville, who sate next to her, that she was glad for her daughter’s sake that my Lord had got so well through it, for that the poor girl was ready to faint away. That affair is now within a few days of its crisis. Your friend, the eldest Miss Gunning, carries on her negotiations in all public places with Lord Coventry.” , And yet neither mother nor daughter could bring the laggard lover to book.

With the Duke of Hamilton it was much easier to deal. He was as impetuous as the other was the reverse. So, wily Mrs. Gunning set a trap for him. She went out purposely one evening with Maria and left the Duke and Elizabeth alone ; the latter had her instructions and acted upon them. She used all the arts of coquetry to work the amorous Duke up to

passion-pitch, and then at the critical moment in came mamma as pre-arranged. Wine and love together had so fired his Grace that he swore he would not wait another hour before making Elizabeth his wife. This is how Horace Walpole describes the *dénouement* :

“The event that has made most noise since my last, is the extempore wedding of the youngest of the two Gunnings, who have made so vehement a noise. Lord Coventry, a grave young lord, of the remains of the patriot breed, has long dangled after the eldest, virtuously with regard to her virtue, not very honourably with regard to his own credit. About six weeks ago, Duke Hamilton, the very reverse of the earl, hot, debauched, extravagant, and equally damaged in his fortune and person, fell in love with the youngest at the masquerade, and determined to marry her in the spring. About a fortnight since, at an immense assembly at my Lord Chesterfield’s, made to show the house, which is really most magnificent, Duke Hamilton made violent love at one end of the room, while he was playing at pharaoh at the other end ; that is, he neither saw the bank nor his own cards, which were of three hundred pounds each ; he soon lost a thousand. I own I was so little a professor in love, that I thought all this parade looked ill for the poor girl ; and could not conceive, if he was so much engaged with his mistress as to disregard such sums, why he played at all. However, two nights afterwards, being left alone with her, while her mother and sister were at Bedford

House, he found himself so impatient that he sent for a parson. The doctor refused to perform the ceremony without licence or ring ; the duke swore he would send for the archbishop—at last they were married with a ring of the bed-curtain, at half an hour after twelve at night, at Mayfair Chapel. The Scotch are enraged ; the women mad that so much beauty has had its effect ; and what is most silly, my Lord Coventry declares that now he will marry the other.”

Three weeks later his lordship screwed his courage to the sticking-place, and Maria became Countess of Coventry. Conceive the righteous joy that filled the maternal bosom of Mrs. Gunning ! Was ever a match-making mother’s triumph more complete ! The wife of a penniless, drunken, raffish Irish squireen had secured two of the finest matches of the season for her daughters, who a few months before had hardly a rag to their backs !

And how did the two lucky adventuresses conduct themselves in their elevated sphere ? Not so badly, when one considers the defects of their education. The musical Irish brogue, coming from perfect lips, condoned little vulgarities of speech which would otherwise have been solecisms in the “caste of Vere de Vere.” The witchery of Irish-blue eyes, with their long, sweeping lashes, hypnotised all beholders, and made them forget everything but the beauty of the faces which those eyes illumined. Of course the girls cut their old friends—that was only to be expected.



It has been the fashion since the days of Joseph, and probably long before. "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." It was with similar convenient forgetfulness that Maria Countess of Coventry treated her old friend, George Anne Bellamy, who had given the slatternly Gunning girl her first start in life, and lent her money, for the repayment of which the free-handed, big-hearted actress had never asked her.

Listen to this story of ingratitude. George Anne was playing "Juliet" at Covent Garden. Lady Coventry, with some friends, was in a private box. Juliet had just commenced that thrilling soliloquy in the third scene of the fourth act :

What if it be a poison, which the friar  
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead ;  
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,  
Because he married me before to Romeo?

There was a dead silence in the house, which was suddenly broken by an insolent laugh from Lady Coventry in the stage-box. So deeply offended were the audience that they insisted upon having the interrupter turned out, and Lady Coventry had to leave the theatre. In revenge she said many nasty things about George Anne Bellamy, which in due course came to the actress's ears. The insult in the theatre George Anne would have overlooked, but these spiteful slanders she resented, and accordingly sent her house-steward to Lady Coventry with a request that

her ladyship would be good enough to repay the money for which she had given her I O U.

“Mrs. Bellamy?” asked the countess contemptuously; “who is she? Do you mean the actress?”

“I do, my lady, and I was instructed to wait for the money.”

“If Mrs. Bellamy is impertinent I will have her hissed off the stage.”

“It is a matter of indifference, my lady, to my mistress, whether she continues on the stage or not; but, if she chooses to perform, it is not in your ladyship’s power to prevent her. I shall be glad if your ladyship will give me an answer to the note I have delivered.”

“Oh! Yes. Tell her I will send her the money.”

But the money was never sent, and George Anne was left to moralise on the ingratitude of beggars who have been set on horseback.

Meanwhile the two beauties lived in a luscious atmosphere of adulation—enough to have turned wiser heads than theirs.

“The world,” writes Horace Walpole, on March 29th, 1752, “is still mad about the Gunnings: the Duchess of Hamilton was presented on Friday: the crowd was so great, that even the noble mob in the Drawing-room clambered upon tables and chairs to look at her. There are mobs at their doors to see them get into

their chairs : and people go early to get places at the theatre when it is known they will be there."

And the strange thing was that this *furore* over the two successful Irish fortune-huntresses was no mere nine-days' wonder. It lasted till the death of the elder sister, and the retirement of the younger to her Highland castle. Mrs. Delany, writing more than two years after the marriage of Maria, thus waxes enthusiastic over her beauty :

"Yesterday, after chapel, the Duchess brought home Lady Coventry to feast me, *and a feast she was!* She is a fine figure, and vastly handsome, notwithstanding a silly look sometimes about her mouth ; she has a thousand airs, but with a sort of innocence that diverts one ! Her dress was a black silk sack, made for a large hoop, which she wore without any, and it trailed a yard on the ground ; she had on a cobweb-laced handkerchief, a pink satin long cloak, lined with ermine mixed with squirrel skins ; on her head a French cap that just covered the top of her head, of blond, and stood in the form of a butterfly with its wings not quite extended ; frilled sort of lappets crossed under her chin, and tied with pink and green ribbon—a head-dress that would have charmed a shepherd ! She has a thousand dimples and prettinesses in her cheeks, her eyes a little drooping at the corners, but fine for all that."

And the same dear old gossip gives us the following anecdote :

"As to news, the prettiest story I heard of the

Masquerade at Somerset House was of Miss Allen, Lady Carysfort's sister, who is a little lively sort of a fairy, not very conversant with the great world, and never goes to Court: she was at the Masquerade, and had a desire to see Lady Coventry; by this time most people were unmasked, especially those I suppose who thought they set off their dress; Miss Allen had her mask on. She went up to Lady Coventry (resolved to make a little sport with her), and after looking at her very earnestly, ‘I have indeed heard a good deal of this lady's beauty, but it far surpasses all I have heard.’—‘What,’ says Lady C., ‘did you never see me before?’ A young man that stood by said to the mask, ‘Are you not an Englishwoman?’—‘I don't know whether I may not be called an Englishwoman, but I am just come from New York upon the fame of this lady, whose beauty is talked of far and near, and I think I came for a very good purpose.’ Many lively entertaining things Miss Allen said on the occasion. Lady Coventry walked off, but the young man would not part with Miss Allen, and said, ‘Come, pull off this mask; I must see who has entertained us so well,’ and made her sit down. ‘Hands off,’ said she, for he offered to take her mask, ‘you know that's impertinent!’ and she said many smart things to him. Lady Carysfort beckoned her to her, and said, ‘Do you know it is Prince Edward you are talking to?’ Miss Allen, in great confusion, thought it was best not to seem to know.”

The women-folk of the *grand monde* would have been more than human if they had not found much to disparage in these two dowerless Irish girls, who had come and snapped up a duke and an earl in the matrimonial market. There were innumerable spiteful little stories told of the *gaucherie* and ignorance of these two upstarts. Here are one or two specimens culled from Horace Walpole :

“I have nothing more to tell you but a *naïveté* of my Lady Coventry : the king asked her if she was not sorry there are no masquerades this year (for you must know we have sacrificed them to the idol earthquake). She said she was tired of them : she was surfeited with most sights ; there was but one left that she wanted to see—and that was a *Coronation* ! The old man told it himself at supper with a great deal of good humour.”

The “earthquake” referred to was that appalling one which on November 1st, 1755, wrecked Lisbon, burying 50,000 people in the ruins ; destroyed Fez and 12,000 Moors : devastated Madeira and made its shocks felt as far north as Scotland. The horror of it eclipsed the gaiety of London, and Society, roused for the moment into hysterical humanity, poured out its contributions so lavishly in aid of the sufferers, that it had nothing left to squander on pleasure.

Of another occasion Horace writes :

“At a great supper t’other night at Lord Hertford’s, if she (Lady Coventry) was not the best-natured

creature in the world, I should have made her angry : she said in a very vulgar accent, if she drank any more she should be *muckibus*. ‘Lord,’ said Lady Mary Coke, ‘What is that?’ ‘Oh! it is Irish for *sentimental*,’ said I.”

But Maria’s vanity received a severe snub when she accompanied her husband to Paris ; and, accustomed as she was to daily admiration, she must have felt bitterly the coldness of her reception by the Parisians. I will let Horace Walpole tell the story.

“Our Beauties (the Countess of Coventry and Lady Caroline Petersham) are returned, and have done no execution. The French would not conceive that Lady Caroline Petersham ever had been handsome, nor that my Lady Coventry has much pretence to be so now. Indeed, all the travelled English allow that there is a Madame de Brionne handsomer, and a finer figure. Poor Lady Coventry was under piteous disadvantages ; for besides being very silly, ignorant of the world, with no breeding, speaking no French, and suffered to wear neither red nor powder, she had that perpetual drawback upon her beauty,—her lord, who is sillier in a wise way, as ignorant, ill-bred, and speaking very little French himself—just enough to show how ill-bred he is. The Duke de Luxemburg told him he had called up my Lady Coventry’s coach ; my lord replied, ‘*Vous avez fort bien fait.*’ He is jealous, prude and scrupulous ; at a dinner at Sir John Bland’s, before sixteen people, he coursed his wife round the

table, on suspecting she had stolen on a little bread, seized her, scrubbed it off by force with a napkin, and then told her, that since she had deceived him and broken her promise, he would carry her back directly to England. They were pressed to stay for the great *fête* at St. Cloud ; he excused himself, 'because it would make him miss a music-meeting at Worcester' ; she excused herself from the fireworks at Madame Pompadour's, 'because it was her dancing-master's hour.'

"I will tell you but one more anecdote, and I think you cannot be imperfect in your ideas of them. The Maréchale de Lowendahl was pleased with an English fan Lady Coventry had, who very civilly gave it her ; my lord made her write for it again next morning, 'because he had given it her before marriage, and her parting with it would make an irreparable breach,' and send an old one in the room of it ! She complains to everybody she meets, 'How odd it is that my lord should use her so ill, when she knows he has so great a regard that he would die for her, and when he was so good as to marry her without a shilling !' Her sister's history is not unentertaining ; Duke Hamilton is the abstract of Scotch pride ; he and the Duchess at their own house, walk in to dinner before their company, sit together at the upper end of their own table, eat off the same plate, and drink to nobody beneath the rank of Earl—would not one wonder how they could get anybody either above or

below that rank to dine with them at all? I don't know whether you will not think all these very trifling histories; but for myself, I love anything that marks a character strongly.”

Maria's husband was fiercely jealous, and she gave him good ground for jealousy. There was always some lover hanging about her and paying her compromising attentions. At one time it was Horace St. John, the young Lord Bolingbroke; and Horace Walpole, alluding to Lady Coventry's dancing at the royal masquerade, which fairly bewitched the king, adds maliciously: “It was just like Herodias, and I believe if he had offered her a boon she would have chosen the head of *St. John*.”

“Gilly” Williams, George Selwyn's friend and correspondent, writing to him from Croome, Lord Coventry's place in Worcestershire, gives us a glimpse of another flirtation of hers. “Our life here,” he writes, “for a little while would not displease you, for we eat and drink well and the Earl holds a pharaoh bank every night to us which we have as yet plundered considerably. You would smile at old Sandys (the Speaker of the House of Lords), who punts like Sir Robert Hildyard, nor would the Captain much displease you while he is studying a pretty attitude for the Countess [of Coventry]. You will find the Countess when you come in high spirits and great beauty.”

When she was up in London for the season of 1759, seven years after her marriage, the countess was as



madly run after as ever. One Sunday evening she was mobbed by an unmannerly crowd of admirers in Hyde Park, who, in their anxiety to stare at her face, hustled and jostled her till she nearly fainted. The king, on nearing of it, gave orders that for the future she should be attended by a guard. And she was foolish enough on the following Sunday to parade herself in the Park from eight o'clock in the evening till ten—with two sergeants of the Foot Guards, armed with halberds, in front of her and twelve privates, with muskets and fixed bayonets, marching behind her !

Sir Nathaniel Wraxall says in his "Memoirs" :

"I have heard the late Earl of Clermont say, that when walking with his two sisters in the Mall of St. James's Park, such crowds collected to gaze at them, and so violent and importunate was their curiosity, that he, as well as the other gentlemen accompanying the Gunnings, have been obliged to draw their swords in order to defend the ladies, while they effected a precipitate retreat into Lord Harrington's house at the corner of the Stable Yard. Lady Coventry I never saw, but the Duchess of Argyll presented, even when far advanced in life, and with very decayed health, a form, figure, and complexion which it would have been vain to seek elsewhere. She seemed composed of a finer clay than the rest of her sex."

But already the seeds of consumption were sown in Lady Coventry's constitution, and the fatal disease made such rapid progress that she soon had to give up

her gay and restless London life and seek rest in the country. Every one could see that she was doomed, but she herself would not believe that her life was in any danger. The first intimation she had of the hopeless nature of her illness came to her through opening a letter from her sister, the Duchess of Hamilton, addressed to Lord Coventry, then away from home. The duchess expressed the deepest sympathy with her brother-in-law and her own grief at the thought that she should never again see her sister alive. The shock which this letter gave to Lady Coventry almost killed her ; for hours she hovered between life and death. But she recovered, and lingered for more than two months. Her vanity remained with her to the last.

“Poor Lady Coventry,” writes Horace Walpole, “concluded her short race with the same attention to her looks. She lay constantly on a couch, with a pocket-glass in her hand, and when that told her how great the change was, she took to her bed the last fortnight, had no light in her room but the lamp of a tea-kettle, and at last took things in through the curtains of her bed, without suffering them to be undrawn. The mob, who never quitted curiosity about her, went, to the number of ten thousand, only to see her coffin. If she had lived to ninety like Helen, I believe they would have thought her wrinkles deserved an epic poem. Poor thing ! how far from ninety ! she was not eight-and-twenty ! ”

Her death took place on October 1st, 1760. Worthy

old Mrs. Delany, who was one of those exasperating persons that *will* improve the occasion, thus comments upon the decease of the celebrated beauty :

“ And what a wretched end Lady Coventry makes after her short-lived reign of beauty ! Not contented with the *extraordinary share* Providence had bestowed on her, she presumptuously and vainly thought to mend it, and by that means they say she has destroyed her life ; for Dr. Taylor says the white she made use of for her face and neck was rank poison ; I wish it may be a warning to her imitators.”

But the dear old moralist's spiteful story was untrue. The use of white-lead, to which most fashionable ladies of that time were insanely addicted, may have affected the countess's health and impaired her complexion, but it certainly was not the cause of her death. She died from consumption, the seeds of which had probably been born with her ; possibly the life of excitement and dissipation she led hastened her end, but in no case could she have lived very much longer than she did. She left two daughters, in whom George Selwyn took an affectionate fatherly interest. One was afterwards the beautiful Lady Anne Foley: both made unhappy marriages and were divorced.

At the time of Lady Coventry's death her sister, the Duchess of Hamilton, was believed also to be dying of the same disease, and was advised to winter abroad. But in her case the progress of the malady was checked, and she lived for more than thirty years

after her life was despaired of. Horace Walpole and other gossips of the time declare that Elizabeth was never so handsome as her sister. But, judging from the portraits which have come down to us, I should certainly be disposed to award the palm to the duchess. If she were not so lively as Maria she was certainly more sensible. She persuaded that wild, rakish husband of hers to leave London, and recuperate his health and his resources on his Scottish estates. There can be no doubt whatever that she kept him alive, by her careful nursing, for at least three or four years longer than he would have lived if he had been left to himself. But he had gone the pace so madly that his shattered constitution was pretty well exhausted, and, with all his wife's and his doctor's patching up, he lived only six years after his marriage.

One triumph Elizabeth enjoyed which her sister never tasted. In 1755 she visited Dublin with her husband, and put up in state at the Eagle Tavern, Cork Hill, which was then what the Shelburne Hotel is now. It must have been sweet to Her Grace the Duchess of Hamilton to drive in her coach and six through the streets, which she had once tramped “in looped and windowed raggedness” as penniless Betty Gunning. The good-hearted Dubliners did not grudge the beautiful adventuress her good luck, but cheered and mobbed her as enthusiastically as her London admirers had done.

Before her husband had been three months in his grave the duchess was pestered with suitors. The Duke of Bridgewater laid his strawberry leaves at her feet, and she would have taken him and them had he not made it a proviso that she was to cease visiting her sister Kitty, who had married a struggling barrister in Dublin. But Betty declined to throw over her own flesh and blood to please even a duke—so Bridgewater retired discomfited, to be promptly succeeded by Colonel John Campbell, heir presumptive to the Dukedom of Argyll. Him the widowed duchess accepted, having an eye to the prospective dukedom, for she had made up her mind that she would never marry any man who could not give her a dignity and title equal to those of her first husband. She had to wait eleven years before Colonel “Jack” came into possession of the estates and title of Macallum More. How stately and proud a lady she was, with all her ducal honours thick around her at Inverary Castle, we learn from the following entertaining description by Boswell, who in company with Dr. Johnson visited the duke during their memorable Scottish tour in 1772 :

“I went,” he says, “to the castle just about the time I supposed the ladies would be retired from dinner. I sent in my name ; and, being shown in, found the amiable duke sitting at the head of his table with several gentlemen. I was most politely received, and gave his grace some particulars of the

curious journey which I had been making with Dr. Johnson. When we rose from the table the duke said to me : ‘I hope you and Dr. Johnson will dine with us to-morrow.’ I thanked his grace, but told him my friend was in a great hurry to get back to London. The duke with a kind complaisancy said, ‘He will stay one day ; and I will take care he shall see this place to advantage.’ I said I should be sure to let him know his grace’s invitation. As I was going away the duke said, ‘Mr. Boswell, won’t you have some tea?’ I thought it best to get over the meeting with the duchess this night ; so respectfully agreed. I was conducted to the drawing-room by the duke, who announced my name ; but the duchess, who was sitting with her daughter, Lady Betty Hamilton, and some other ladies, took not the least notice of me. I should have been mortified at being thus coldly received by a lady of whom I, with the rest of the world, have always entertained a very high admiration, had I not been consoled by the obliging attention of the duke.”

Now Boswell, it should be explained, had incurred the duchess’s deep displeasure by taking a prominent part against her in a celebrated case in which the claims of Lord Archibald Stewart and Lady Jane Douglas had been disputed by the Hamiltons. Consequently he had no right to expect anything but a cold reception. However, he accepted the invitation to dinner on the following day and thus frankly narrates what passed,

apparently with some pride in his own matchless impudence :

“When we came in before dinner, we found the duke and some gentlemen in the hall. The duke placed Dr. Johnson next himself at table. I was in fine spirits ; and though sensible that I had the misfortune of not being in favour with the duchess, I was not in the least disconcerted, and offered her grace some of the dish that was before me. It must be owned that I was quite in the right to be unconcerned if I could. I was the Duke of Argyll’s guest ; and I had no reason to suppose that he adopted the prejudices and resentments of the Duchess of Hamilton.

“I knew it was the rule of modern high life not to drink to anybody ; but that I might have the satisfaction for once to look the duchess in the face, with a glass in my hand I, with a respectful air, addressed her ; ‘My lady duchess, I have the honour to drink your grace’s good health.’ I repeated the words audibly and with a steady countenance. This was, perhaps, rather too much ; but some allowance must be made for human feelings. The duchess was very attentive to Dr. Johnson. ‘I fancy you will be a *Methodist*.’ This was the only sentence her grace deigned to utter to me ; and I take it for granted, she thought it a good hit on my credulity in the Douglas cause.

“Dr. Johnson talked a great deal, and was so entertaining that after dinner Lady Betty Hamilton went and placed her chair close to his, leaned upon the back

of it, and listened eagerly. It would have made a fine picture to have drawn the sage and her at this time in their several attitudes. He did not know, all the while, how much he was honoured. I told him afterwards. I never saw him so gentle and complaisant as this day.

“We went to tea. The duke and I walked up and down the drawing-room conversing. The duchess still continued to show the same marked coldness for me; for which, though I suffered from it, I made every allowance, considering the very warm part that I had taken for Douglas, in the cause in which she thought her son deeply interested. Had not her grace discovered some displeasure towards me, I should have suspected her of insensibility or dissimulation.

“Her grace made Dr. Johnson come and sit by her, and asked him why he made his journey so late in the year. ‘Why, madam,’ said he, ‘you know Mr. Boswell must attend the Court of Session, and it does not rise till the twelfth of August.’ She said with some sharpness, ‘I know nothing of Mr. Boswell.’ I shall make no remark on her grace’s speech. I indeed felt it as rather too severe; but when I recollected that my punishment was inflicted by so dignified a beauty, I had that kind of consolation which a man would feel who is strangled by a *silken cord*. Dr. Johnson was all attention to her grace. He used afterwards a droll expression upon her enjoying the three titles of Hamilton, Brandon, and Argyll. Borrowing an image



from the Turkish Empire, he called her a *Duchess* with *three tails*."

There was not so much of the coquette about the Duchess of Argyll as there was about her flightier sister, the Countess of Coventry. But her grace, too, had a craving for flattery and homage, and was not always discreet in the means she took to secure them. Poor, plain, homely Queen Charlotte was caused many a sharp pang of jealousy by the encouragement which the beautiful duchess gave to the king's manifest admiration of her charms. For George III., albeit in his latter days a model of domestic propriety, had a keen eye for a pretty face, and was easily moved to amorous tendencies by the coquetries of a charming woman. During his first attack of lunacy he was perpetually calling for Lady Pembroke, whom Horace Walpole describes as "the picture of majestic modesty." She was then an elderly dame, but the poor, imbecile king remembered her only in the zenith of her charms, and his terms of endearment were all lavished upon her under her maiden name. Scandal, however, could never seize upon anything tangible wherewith to besmirch the reputation of the Duchess of Argyll: she was far too circumspect to give any handle to her enemies. She was not a woman with much heart, and it is impossible to forgive her for the part she played in making her daughter, Lady Betty Hamilton, unhappy for life. A cold, calculating schemer, like her mother, the duchess would not listen to any remonstrances from Lady

Betty, who hated the man to whom her mother insisted on marrying her.

Oh ! I see thee old and formal, fitted to a petty part,  
With a little hoard of maxims, preaching down a daughter's heart :  
“They were dangerous guides, the feelings—she herself was not  
exempt :  
Truly she herself had suffered ” : Perish in thy self-contempt !

The match was no doubt a brilliant one, for Lady Betty's suitor was Lord Stanley, heir to the Earldom of Derby, and the girl accepted her fate. She paid for her coronet by twenty years of misery, and had the satisfaction of knowing on her death-bed that her lord would console himself for her death by wedding her rival and supplanter, Eliza Farren, the fascinating actress, who had already stolen his heart. The duchess's daughter by her second marriage, the lovely and accomplished Charlotte Campbell, had an equally unhappy lot, as I shall tell in my next chapter.

The death of the duchess herself occurred in 1790, in her 57th year.

And how had it fared with the mercenary mother who had hawked her daughters for sale in the marriage-market and made such excellent bargains for both ? Mrs. Gunning's lot was more enviable than that of her children. She had the serene satisfaction of feeling that she had done her duty by them, and as, through their interest, she was appointed to the snug sinecure of housekeeper at Somerset House, her lines were cast in pleasant places. It is true that there were some slight

drops of bitterness in her cup. Her daughter Lucy, who promised to be the most beautiful of all the girls, died of consumption in 1753, before she had a chance of making a brilliant match ; Kitty, who had attractions enough to have warranted her in, at any rate, looking for a rich English commoner, married a poor Dublin barrister ; John, the only son, "the sweet boy" whom George Anne Bellamy saw in Britain Street, became a General indeed, but was brought into very unpleasant notoriety by the eccentricities of his daughter Gunilda, who, bitten with the family craze for marrying into the peerage, tried to force Lord Blandford into an engagement by forged love-letters, but ignominiously failed : and lastly, her husband, the dissipated squireen of Castle Coote, was a perpetual thorn in his wife's side, for his habits were those of Captain Costigan ; he would brag by the hour of the beauty of his daughters and their distinguished position—and men fled as they saw him approach. However, he had the decency to die in 1767, and left his widow to enjoy three years of unalloyed peace before she received her summons to quit Somerset House and the world in which she had so successfully plotted and schemed.

The beautiful Gunnings are the only women in these pages whose fair faces were their sole claim to homage. They had no charms of mind or heart. They were vain, shallow, ignorant, and foolish. They had hardly a single quality of good womanhood. Yet their sheer loveliness covered a multitude of sins and

made conquests which wit, wisdom, and goodness could scarcely have surpassed, and have often failed to attain. They were Queens by the royal right of beauty. The spell they threw over their vassals was the strongest if not the subtlest in the sorcery of their sex.

A man had given all other bliss,  
And all his worldly worth for this,  
To waste his whole heart in one kiss  
Upon those perfect lips.

Byron sings of “the fatal gift of beauty.” Few women have made more capital out of that gift than the sisters Gunning—to none, of whom there is any record in the last two centuries, has that gift brought more fame and admiration—and yet, who can read their story without feeling that the gift was indeed a “fatal” one, for it secured no happiness either to its possessors or those to whom they transmitted it!

## CHAPTER IX

### A VICTIM OF INDISCRETION

BEYOND question the most beautiful and the most remarkable of the descendants of the two Irish "Goddesses" was Lady Charlotte Campbell, the youngest daughter of Elizabeth Duchess of Argyll. For she inherited not only the beauty of the Gunnings, but the brains of the Campbells.

Robert Chambers, in his *Traditions of Edinburgh*, describing a visit which he paid to the house of that eccentric literary and antiquarian genius, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, says: "One petty object was strongly indicative of character, a calling card of Lady Charlotte Campbell, the once adored beauty, stuck into the frame of a picture. He must have kept it at that time about thirty years." That "petty object," which Robert Chambers viewed with contempt, was doubtless cherished as a relic which recalled the time when Lady Charlotte was the Queen of Edinburgh society, when her parties were celebrated as gatherings of the brightest intellects of the "Modern Athens," and to be numbered on her visiting list was an honour prized by the foremost wits and litterateurs of the time. Walter Scott, writing to



*From an engraving, after the picture by W. Read.*

LADY CHARLOTTE BURY.



George Ellis on March 2nd, 1802, says : "I am glad you have seen the Marquess of Lorne, whom I have met frequently at the house of his charming sister, Lady Charlotte Campbell, whom I am sure, if you are acquainted with her, you must admire as much as I do." And Lockhart in his *Life of Scott*, referring to the visit to Edinburgh of that gloomy novelist, dramatist, and poet, Matthew Gregory Lewis, then at the height of his popularity, and generally known as "Monk" Lewis, from his once famous novel *The Monk*, remarks : "Lady Charlotte Campbell (now Bury), always distinguished in her passion for elegant letters, was ready 'in pride of rank, in beauty's bloom,' to do the honours of Scotland, to the 'Lion of Mayfair,' and I believe Scott's first introduction to Lewis took place at one of her ladyship's parties."

Born at Argyll House, Oxford Street, the London mansion of her father, on January 28th, 1775, Lady Charlotte was from her childhood remarkable for her beauty and intelligence. She was married in her sixteenth year to her cousin, Colonel John Campbell, of Schawfield, who was afterwards M.P. for the Ayr Burghs, and by whom she had nine children. At the age of twenty-two she produced anonymously a volume of poems. That she had some facility in verse-writing no one will deny, and as a specimen of her muse I quote the following, to which Sir Walter Scott, in his review of Sir Humphry Davy's *Salmonia*, pays this high tribute :



## Queens of Beauty

"We cannot resist the temptation to transcribe some sweet verses introduced in the first dialogue of *Salmonia*, the contribution of a lady whose elegant genius adorns her high rank:—'A noble lady (says Halieus), long distinguished at Court for pre-eminent beauty and grace, and whose mind possesses undying charms, has written some lines in my copy of Walton, which, if you will allow me, I will repeat to you.

"Albeit, gentle Angler, I  
 Delight not in thy trade,  
 Yet in thy pages there doth lie,  
 So much of quaint simplicity ;  
     So much of mind  
     Of such good kind,  
 That none need be afraid,  
 Caught by thy cunning bait, this book,  
 To be ensnarèd on thy hook.

Gladly from thee, I'm lured to bear  
 With things that seem'd most 'vile before,  
 For thou didst on poor subjects rear  
 Matter the wisest sage might hear,  
     And with a grace,  
     That doth efface  
 More labour'd works, thy simple lore  
 Can teach us that thy skilful *lines*,  
 More than the scaly brood *confines*.

Our hearts and senses, too, we see,  
 Rise quickly, at thy master hand,  
 And ready to be caught by thee,  
 Are lured to virtue willingly.  
     Content and peace  
     With health and ease,  
 Walk by thy side. At thy command  
 We bid adieu to worldly care,  
 And join in gifts that all may share.

Gladly, with thee, I pace along,  
And of sweet fancies dream ;  
Waiting till some inspired song,  
Within my memory cherished long,  
Comes fairer forth  
With more of worth ;  
Because that time upon its stream  
Feathers and chaff will bear away,  
But give to gems a brighter ray.

“And though,” continues Sir Humphry, “the charming and intellectual author of this poem is not an angler herself, yet I can quote the examples of her lovely daughters, to vindicate fly-fishing from the charge of cruelty, and to prove that the most delicate and refined minds can take pleasure in this innocent amusement. One of these young ladies, I am told, is a most accomplished and skilful salmon fisher.”

The lines, though creditable, can hardly be said to merit such high encomium. But Sir Walter was so kindly hearted, and so averse from hurting any one's feelings, that his criticisms of his contemporaries in literature have rarely any weight or value. In this case I think that both he and Sir Humphry Davy were blinded to the imperfections of the poetess by the charms of the woman, the sweetness and courtesy of whose manners won the affection, as her beauty excited the admiration, of all who had the privilege of her friendship. The following verses, which are not, I think, to be found in any collected edition of his works, are a further proof of the feelings

entertained by the "Wizard of the North" towards this charming woman :

"Lines addressed to Lady Charlotte Campbell, with a manuscript copy of the author's poems, in return for a printed collection of her own poetry, by Sir Walter Scott of Edinburgh, 1799.

"Of old 'tis said in Illium's battling days,  
Ere friendship knew a price, or faith was sold,  
The Chief, high-minded, famed in Homer's lays,  
For meanest brass exchanged his arms of gold.

Say, lovely lady, know you not of one  
Who, with the Lycian hero's generous fire,  
Gave lays might rival Grecia's sweetest tone  
For the rude numbers of a northern lyre?

Yet, tho' unequal all to match my debt,  
Yet take these lines to thy protecting hand,  
Nor heedless hear a Gothic bard repeat  
The wizard harping of thy native land.

For each (forgive the vaunt) a wreath may grow,  
At distance due as my rude verse from thine ;  
The classic laurel crown thy lovely brow,  
The Druid's magic mistletoe be mine."

I have looked in vain among Lady Charlotte's literary remains to find anything which could justify such extravagant eulogy.

In 1809 Colonel Campbell died, and Lady Charlotte was left with a large family and small means. The Princess of Wales, however, who was fond of her, exercised her influence to obtain for the impoverished widow an appointment as Lady-in-Waiting in the Royal Household. The post carried with it a salary of £500

a year, which was a very welcome addition to Lady Charlotte's income, but it would have been a thousand times better for her happiness and her reputation, if she had never been connected with the Court, and had never been brought into such intimate relations with the ill-fated princess.

A popular living anecdotist tells the following story :  
“ A young lady who had just been appointed a Maid of Honour was telling some friends with whom she was dining, that one of the conditions of the offer was that she should not keep a diary of what went on at Court. A cynical man of the world, who was present, said, ‘ What a tiresome rule ! I think I should keep my diary all the same.’ ‘ Then,’ replied the young lady, ‘ I am afraid you would not be a Maid of Honour.’ ”

I don't know that any such condition was imposed upon Ladies-in-Waiting at the Court of the Prince Regent, but, whether it were or not, Lady Charlotte kept a diary, and that diary was her undoing. She enjoyed to a large extent the confidence of Queen Caroline, whilst the latter was Princess of Wales, and undoubtedly received many benefits at the hands of Her Royal Highness. One of Lady Charlotte's contemporaries writes, “ The princess has heaped benefits on Lady C. Campbell, and sent her a thousand ducats in hard cash as soon as she arrived at Genoa.”

Lady Charlotte Campbell, therefore, had every reason to be grateful and loyal to the queen. How

she showed her gratitude and loyalty I shall tell presently. But, before referring to the notorious *Diary*—on the publication of which Lady Charlotte was ostracised from Society—there are one or two previous events in her life to be noticed. She married, as her second husband, the Reverend Edward John Bury, a man of a good Somersetshire family, and Rector of Litchfield, Hants. On his death in 1832, at the age of forty-two, Lady Charlotte supplemented her income by writing novels of Society, which obtained considerable popularity. *Flirtation*, *Separation*, *Divorced*, were in great demand at the circulating libraries, for, whatever their literary shortcomings may have been, they presented vivid and spirited pictures of high life, evidently painted by one who belonged to the world she described, and was not dependent on second-hand information for her materials. Consider what a rush there is nowadays for any scandalous or satirical book written by a person of title, and letting the public behind the scenes of that *grand monde*, outside the closed gates of which British snobbery waits, like the Peri shut out from Paradise, yearning for the slightest glimpse of the superior creatures within ; and you will not be at a loss to account for the popularity of Lady Charlotte's novels, which were decidedly what in modern literary argot would be called "smart."

In the year 1838, Society was startled, and professed to be shocked, at the appearance of a *chronique*

*scandaleuse*, entitled *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George IV.: interspersed with Original Letters from the Late Queen Caroline, and from various other Distinguished Persons*. It was an open secret that Lady Charlotte Bury was the author, and that Colburn, the publisher, had paid her £1,000 for the right of publication. Some attempt was made by the writer to pose as a man, and, with the idea of throwing the reader off the scent, Lady Charlotte was more than once alluded to by name as "the beauty of the Argyll family." But the palpable ruse deceived no one who belonged to Lady Charlotte's world.

The book provoked a storm of execration.

The newspapers and reviews absolutely foamed with furious indignation over this outrage upon all the decencies of social life. The *Quarterly* pronounced it "the most scandalous publication that has ever disgraced English, or as far as we know, European literature. . . . We understand that the author is a lady hitherto known in the circulating libraries by some trivial publications, indicating no worse qualities than those of silliness and affectation, and who had never been suspected of grave offences of any description."

In the *Edinburgh*, Brougham brought all the batteries of his sarcasm and eloquence to bear upon the *Diary* and its author. Charles Greville happened to call upon him as he was composing the article and was struck with the way his pen rattled over the paper,

and still more impressed with the power and weight of the review when it appeared inside the famous blue and buff covers. I cannot say that I have myself been much impressed with that scathing critique of Brougham's. Like his famous speech in defence of Queen Caroline, with its seventeen times re-written peroration, it strikes me as turgid and stilted. But he came down heavily on poor Lady Charlotte for her treachery and baseness in betraying the secrets of the Court and the confidences of the queen. "This silly, dull, disgraceful publication!" he calls the *Diary*. Now, disgraceful it may have been, but silly and dull it certainly was not. It is full of graphic and piquant sketches of her contemporaries. There may be differences of opinion as to the writer's good taste, but I think no one who reads the book now will deny its raciness. Unfortunately, however, it came out, like the Jacobite *Memoirs of Lockhart of Carnwath*, and "the blazing indiscretions" of Prince Hohenlohe, too soon after the events it chronicled, and its revelations fell like a bombshell in Society. Greville refers to the publication in his *Memoirs* as "wretched catchpenny trash," and adds, "nobody could by possible conception compose anything more vile and despicable." But then, both Greville and Brougham were warm supporters of Queen Caroline, and the recollection of her wrongs was still fresh in their minds.

It is difficult nowadays to feel any sympathy with

that unhappy queen. She was probably innocent of the more serious charges brought against her, but she had to thank her own reckless, impudent defiance of public opinion, her shameless levity and indecency of conduct, for the grave imputations made against her morals. The people, however, were with her to a man, and believed that her husband had driven her deliberately into the doubtful and shady society in which she mixed, in the hope that she would so compromise her character as to enable him to obtain a divorce. After all, what right had such a notorious libertine as George IV. to cast a stone at his Consort? Greville, who knew him well and had no reason to judge him unfairly, declared that "a more contemptible, cowardly, unfeeling, selfish dog does not exist than this king." And it was because the general public was of the same opinion that it lavished its sympathy upon the queen with a demonstrative enthusiasm which made timorous folk fear that, if she were not acquitted, there would be a popular uprising. One turns with disgust from the sordid, squalid details of that trial, than which nothing more scandalous and undignified has ever been recorded of British Royalty. The king, the queen, the witnesses—it is hard to say for which of the three one feels the most contempt. And Brougham, with that seventeen-times-re-written peroration, with his sanctified smirk and upraised hands, blending the unctuous piety of a Chadband with the forensic bombast of a



Buzfuz,—is he not as despicable a figure as any of them?

The “Original letters of Queen Caroline” published by Lady Charlotte Bury in her *Diary* are not of an incriminating character. But it was unkind and disloyal, to say the least of it, to publish foolish, vulgar and spiteful letters which were intended for no eye but that of the person to whom they were written.

People asked in bewilderment, “How could so amiable and charming a woman be guilty of such treachery and execrable bad taste?” And, indeed, Lady Charlotte was the last person one would have suspected of writing such a book. But, no doubt, she was hard up, and the temptation to sell her budget of racy scandal and gossip was too strong to be resisted. Let us be charitable and allow this much in extenuation of her fault, that it was her poverty, not her will, that consented to the deed, which brought upon her such a swift and merciless Nemesis.

The *Diary*, though in four volumes, had an extraordinary sale, as was only natural, for nothing takes the public taste like scandal, and those who most loudly and bitterly condemned the book were probably those to whom its perusal afforded a malign pleasure. The general verdict, however, pronounced it detestable conduct on the part of a person, living in a select society, to keep notes of every unguarded expression and every thoughtless or careless action of her intimates, and then publish them to the

world. Life would be intolerable if no one could venture to be *en négligé* without being exposed to the rude gaze of an unfeeling public—if there were always the consciousness that—

A chiel's amang ye takin' notes  
And, faith, he'll prent it.

So Lady Charlotte Bury was ostracised : her aristocratic acquaintances cut her dead and her place in Society knew her no more.

She sank into complete obscurity. Nearly all her children died before her, for she kept a lingering hold on life till she had passed her ninety-second year, and when her death was announced on March 31st, 1867, the few who remembered her scandal were surprised to find she had not died years before. The once charming, beautiful and brilliant Queen of Edinburgh Society, the ornament of London salons, the intimate friend of Royalty, the popular authoress, died alone and forgotten among strangers, in a Chelsea lodging-house, and was described vaguely in her burial certificate as "the daughter of a duke and the widow of the Reverend E. J. Bury, holding no benefice." One might almost apply to her the lines from Pope's "Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady."

By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed,  
By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed,  
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorned,  
By strangers honour'd and by strangers mourn'd.

Fortune dealt unkindly with Lady Charlotte Bury—

the Fates were against her. It is a relief to turn to another Queen of Beauty, whose life, though darkened by disappointment and chequered with shame, was yet irradiated with the glory and the joy of proud motherhood.

## CHAPTER X

### A CROWN WELL LOST

MOTHER of heroes! If ever that title were well deserved by any woman, it was surely by her who bore such sons as the Conqueror of Scinde and the Historian of the Peninsular War, and their equally gallant, though less celebrated brothers, George Thomas and Henry Edward Napier. Her story is a romantic one: not only from the circumstances attending her two marriages, but from the fact that she might, if she had chosen to play the cards she held at the right moment, have been the Queen of George III. Perhaps it was well for her happiness that she missed the royal honours which at one time lay within her grasp; and when, in after-years, she saw the sorrow and suffering entailed upon her homely little rival Queen Charlotte, she doubtless thanked her stars that she had been spared the infliction of a mad husband, even though he were a king.

Lady Sarah Lennox was the fourth daughter of Charles, second Duke of Richmond, and great-granddaughter of Charles II., whose son, by Louise de Perren-

court, Duchess of Portsmouth, was created first Duke. Her mother, Lady Sarah Cadogan, was married under circumstances as extraordinary as romancer ever invented. The story is thus told by her grandson Captain Henry Edward Napier, the sailor of the family, in a then unpublished manuscript quoted by the Princess of Liechtenstein in her work on Holland House, since published in *The Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox*, edited by the Countess of Ilchester and Lord Stavordale.

“This marriage was made to cancel a gambling debt, the young people’s consent having been the last thing thought of. The Earl of March was sent for from school and the young lady from her nursery: a clergyman was in attendance and they were told that they were immediately to become man and wife! The young lady is not reported to have uttered a word. The gentleman exclaimed: “*They are surely not going to marry me to that dowdy!*” The ceremony, however, took place, a post-chaise was ready at the door, and Lord March was instantly packed off with his tutor to make the “Grand Tour,” whilst his young wife was returned to the care of her mother, a Dutch-woman, daughter of William Munster, Counsellor of the Courts of Holland. After some years spent abroad Lord March returned, a well-educated, handsome young man, but with no very agreeable recollections of his wife. Wherefore, instead of at once seeking his own home, he went directly to the



*From a mazzotint by E. Fisher, after the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds.*

LADY SARAH LENNOX, AFTERWARDS BUNBURY AND NAPIER.



opera or theatre, where he amused himself between the acts in examining the company. He had not been long occupied in this manner, when a very young and beautiful woman more especially struck his fancy, and turning to a gentleman beside him, he asked who she was.

"You must be a stranger in London," replied the gentleman, "not to know the toast of the town, the beautiful Lady March!"

Agreeably surprised at this intelligence, Lord March proceeded to the box, announced himself, and claimed his bride, the very dowdy whom he had so scornfully rejected some years before, but with whom he afterwards lived so happily that she died of a broken heart within a year of his decease, which took place at Godalming in Surrey, in August 1750, "when my mother was only five years and a few months old."

Lady Sarah inherited her mother's beauty and vivacity, and when she was but five years of age attracted the attention of George II. under the circumstances thus described by her fifth son, Captain Henry Edward Napier, R.N.

"My grandfather being about the Court, his children were often taken to walk in Kensington Gardens by their French or Swiss governess, to see the Royal Family promenade, as they usually did, on the broad walk. The children could speak no English, and on one of these days of public procession, while the governess and my aunt, Lady Louisa Conolly,



were quietly looking on, my mother, who was of a lively, volatile disposition, suddenly broke from the astonished Frenchwoman, and bounding up to the king, exclaimed :

“ ‘ *Comment vous portez-vous, Monsieur le Roi, vous avez une grande et belle maison ici, n'est-ce pas ?* ’ ”

“ Old George II. was delighted with this *naïveté*, and soon discovering who she was, desired that she should be brought very often to see him.”

And his Majesty's desire was gratified. Little Lady Sarah was taken frequently to amuse him. How well she succeeded in doing so Captain Napier goes on to tell :

“ On one occasion,” “ after a romp with my mother, he (the king) suddenly snatched her up in his arms, and, after depositing her in a large China jar, shut down the cover to prove her courage, but soon released her when he found that the only effect was to make her, with a merry voice, begin singing the French song of ‘ Malbruc,’ with which he was quite delighted.”

Not long after this, Lady Sarah lost her mother, and was sent with her sister, Lady Louisa, to Ireland, where she remained under the care of Lady Kildare, afterwards Duchess of Leinster, till she was thirteen. Then she returned to England and was placed under the guardianship of her eldest sister, Lady Holland, the wife of Henry Fox, first Baron Holland, at Holland House. The king, on hearing of her return, remembered his lively little friend with whom he had

romped ten years before, and expressed a wish to see her. Lady Sarah had grown into a beautiful but timid girl of fifteen, but his Majesty appeared to have quite ignored the lapse of years, and proceeded to joke and play with the girl of fifteen as he had done with the child of five. Poor bashful, embarrassed Sarah shrank blushing from these familiarities. Whereupon that "Naughty little Mahomet," as Thackeray calls him, turned from her with disgust, exclaiming : "Pooh ! she's grown quite stupid !"

But there was a young man present who sympathised with the girl's embarrassment whilst he was deeply struck with her beauty. This was none other than the Heir Apparent to the Throne, and the impression which Lady Sarah made upon him that day was never effaced to the end of his life.

Every time he saw her subsequently his admiration increased, till his attentions became so marked as to attract the notice of every one except the fair object of them, who was too much absorbed in her pet dogs and squirrels to trouble her head about lovers, even though they came in the guise of princes. But she soon threw away her modest and simple shyness and developed into an arrant little flirt.

Lord Holland gives us quite an inventory of Lady Sarah's charms at this period. "Her beauty," he says, "is not easily described, otherwise than by saying she had the finest complexion, most beautiful hair, and prettiest person that ever was seen, with a

sprightly and fine air, a pretty mouth and remarkably fine teeth and excess of bloom in her cheeks, little eyes—but this is not describing her, for her great beauty was a peculiarity of countenance that made her at the same time different from, and prettier than any other girl I ever saw.”

Lady Sarah's great friend and confidante, then and always, was her cousin Lady Susan Strangways, daughter of Lord Ilchester and niece of Lord Holland. They appear together in the famous picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds at Holland House, of which a reproduction is given in these pages. Lady Sarah Lennox is leaning out of a window of Holland House, and Lady Susan Strangways, who is below with Charles James Fox, then a boy of fourteen, is offering her a dove. Horace Walpole gives us a pleasing picture of the friends in the following passage in one of his letters :

“I was excessively amused on Tuesday night ; there was a play at Holland House, acted by children ; not all children, for Lady Sarah Lennox and Lady Susan Strangways played the women. It was *Jane Shore* ; Mr. Price (Lord Barrington's nephew) was ‘Gloster,’ and acted better than three parts of the comedians ; Charles Fox, ‘Hastings’ ; a little Nichols, who spoke well, ‘Belmour’ ; Lord Ofaly, ‘Lord Ashbroke,’ and other boys did the rest : but the two girls were delightful, and acted with so much nature and simplicity, that they appeared the very things they represented. Lady Sarah was more beautiful than

you can conceive, and her very awkwardness gave an air of truth to the shame of the part, and the antiquity of the time which was kept up by her dress, taken out of Montfaucon. Lady Susan was dressed from Jane Seymour ; and all the parts were clothed in ancient habits, and with the most minute propriety. I was infinitely more struck with the last scene between the two women than ever I was when I have seen it on the stage. When Lady Sarah was in white, with her hair about her ears, and on the ground, no Magdalen by Correggio was half so lovely and expressive. You would have been charmed too with seeing Mr. Fox's little boy (Henry Edward), of six years old, who is beautiful, and acted the Bishop of Ely, dressed in lawn sleeves, and with a square cap ; they had inserted two lines for him, which he could hardly speak plainly. Doctor Francis had given them a pretty prologue."

It was to Lady Susan Strangways that the love-sick king confided his passion. He met her one night at a private Court ball and said to her :

"When do you intend to leave Town?"

"I intend to remain for the Coronation, sir."

"Ah ! that will be a fine sight, but it will not take place yet. There will be no coronation till there is a queen."

Lady Susan expressed her surprise, and his Majesty continued :

"They want me to have a foreign queen, but I

prefer an English one, and I think *your friend* is the fittest person in the world to be my queen. Tell her so from me, will you ?”

He said this so earnestly that Lady Susan was much surprised, and promised without delay to give his message to Lady Sarah.

A day or two later the king met Lady Sarah, and, taking her aside, asked anxiously :

“Has your friend told you of our conversation ?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What do you think of it, then ? Tell me, for my happiness depends on your answer—what do you think of it ?”

“Nothing, sir,” said Lady Sarah, dropping her eyes in embarrassment.

“Pooh ! nothing comes of nothing.”

And with that the king walked off in a huff. She did not probably realise at the moment what she was throwing away. But it is certain that if she had encouraged the king’s suit he would have married her. It is said that she was in love with Lord Newbattle, afterwards Marquis of Lothian, and that this was the reason that she refused the royal offer. George was undoubtedly madly jealous of Lord Newbattle, but Lady Sarah’s affections do not appear to have been really engaged—she was merely indulging in a passing flirtation with the handsome young nobleman, and she soon threw him over. It was not long after the king’s proposal that Lady Sarah met

with a bad accident in Somersetshire. She was thrown from her horse, and broke her leg. When Lord Newbattle heard of it he made a coarse and unfeeling joke. "It will do no great harm," he said, "for her legs were ugly enough before"—a remark which was scarcely what a lady might have expected from a devoted lover.

The king, on the other hand, made no secret of his intense anxiety. It was only with difficulty that he was restrained from going off to see her. His inquiries after her health were constant and tender. He gave orders that one of the Court physicians should go down and attend upon her, and showed such unmistakable signs of his devotion, that his royal relations were in a state of the greatest alarm.

His mother, the Dowager Princess of Wales, was in a terrible stew. What provision could she expect for her children, what consideration for herself, if the king surrendered himself a captive to a beautiful and designing woman, who could turn him round her little finger? The Lennox family, on the other hand, now woke up to the possibilities of a royal alliance, and were determined not to let the opportunity slip. The lovely Sarah's heart was softened towards the king by the tender solicitude he had shown for her when she was laid up from the effects of her accident, and the prospect of being queen was no longer distasteful to her.

When she came back to London she found that

she was the observed of all observers. The king's demeanour was most respectful and devoted. His eyes followed her everywhere, and he made no secret of his annoyance, when he saw that there was an organised conspiracy to break up every attempt at a *tête-à-tête*. Lord Bute, the Secretary of State, had been won over to the Princess Dowager's party ; he had instructions never to let the young people be for a moment alone, and he did his duty most assiduously ; whilst the princess herself watched her son with ceaseless vigilance, and would obtrude herself between him and Lady Sarah in the rudest manner, laughing so offensively in her face that the high-spirited girl must have longed to box her ears. Lady Sarah was now quite alive to the greatness and splendour of the future which apparently awaited her. She and her faithful friend Lady Susan Strangways used to drive out in a little pony-chaise to intercept the king in his early rides. The artless Sarah, attired in a most bewitching fancy costume, was to be seen every morning making hay in one of the meadows at Holland House close to the road, just at the time when the king passed on horseback.

But George, deeply in love though he was, had given his word that he would not marry without consulting his Privy Council, and he fought shy of committing himself any further with the enchanting hay-maker. Nevertheless, her chances of becoming queen still seemed far from remote to those about the

Court. A significant illustration of the prevalent opinion was expressed by Lady Barrington, who was proud of possessing the most lovely back in England. One day, as Lady Sarah was entering the Presence Chamber, Lady Barrington, who was behind her, pulled her aside and said, "Do, my dear Lady Sarah, let me take the lead and go in before you this once, for you will never have another opportunity of seeing my beautiful back."

But the king was so jealously guarded now, that there was no chance of any love passages between them. They could not even exchange the ordinary salutations without instant interruption, and, it is said that Lady Sarah once in desperation disguised herself as a servant maid in order to get speech of the king as he passed through the guard-room. Lady Sarah had lost her golden opportunity and never had another. The Privy Council had commissioned Colonel Graeme, once a prominent Jacobite, and Master of the Royal Buckhounds, to visit all the Protestant Courts of Europe, and report on the unmarried princesses. He reported in favour of Charlotte Sophia, daughter of Charles Louis Duke of Mecklenburgh-Strelitz ; and George, who had placed himself in the hands of his Privy Council, stoically put away the one romance of his life, barring perhaps the episode of the fair Quaker Hannah Lightfoot, and offered his hand to the Princess Charlotte. He had summoned his Council to meet on July 8th,



1761, to learn his decision upon the proposed marriage. But Lady Sarah had got wind of his intentions before they were publicly announced, and she wrote the following letter to Lady Susan Strangways, the spelling in which I leave unchanged :

"July 7th, 1761.

"MY DEAREST SUSAN,

To begin to astonish you as much as I was, I must tell you that the —— is going to be married to a Princess of Mecklenbourg, and that I am sure of it. There is a Council to-morrow on purpose. The orders for it are *urgent* and *important* business; does not your Chollar (*sic*) rise at hearing this? But you think I dare say that I have been doing some terrible thing to deserve it, for you would not easily be brought to change so totally your opinion of any person, but I assure you I have not. . . . I shall take care to shew that I am not mortified to anybody, but if it is true that one can vex anybody with a reserved cold manner, he shall have it, I promise him. Now as to what I think about it myself, excepting this little revenge, I have almost forgiven him; luckily for me I did not love him, and only liked, nor did the title weigh anything with me. So little, at least, that my disappointment did not affect my spirits above an hour or two I believe; I did not cry I assure you, which I believe you will, as I know you were more set upon it than I was; the thing I am most angry at is looking so like a fool, as I shall, for having gone so often

for nothing, but I don't much care, if he was to change his mind again (which can't be tho') and not give me a *very* good reason for his conduct I would not have him; for if he is so weak as to be governed by everybody I shall have but a bad time of it. Now I charge you Dear Lady Sue not to mention this to anybody but Ld. and Ly. Ilchester and desire them not to speak of it to any mortal, for it will be said we invent storries and he will hate us all any way, for one generally hates people that one is in the wrong with, and that knows one has acted wrong, particularly if they speak of it, and it might do a great deal of harm to the rest of the family, and do me no good. So pray remember this, for a secret among many people is very bad, and I must tell it to some.

"We are to act a play and have a little ball. I wish you were here to enjoy them; and to show that we are not so melancholy quite."

On July 16th, after the public announcement of the betrothal, the king met Lady Sarah and spoke to her. "She answered short," says Henry Fox, in his unpublished memoirs among the Holland House MSS., "with dignity and gravity and a cross look neither of which things are at all natural to her." Yet he maintains that she was absolutely indifferent to the king's marriage.

"To many a girl H.M.'s behaviour had been very vexatious. But Lady Sarah's temper and affections are happily so flexible and light that the sickness of

her squirrel immediately took up all her attention, and when, in spite of her nursing, it dy'd I believe it gave her more concern than H.M. ever did.

“That grief, however, soon gave way to the care of a little hedgehog that she sav'd from destruction in the field and is now her favourite.”

This indifference strikes me as being a little overdone. One has only to read between the lines of her letter to Lady Susan Strangways to perceive how mortified and vexed Lady Sarah was at losing the prize which might have been hers, had she taken the king seriously when he first proposed to her. That she was heartily glad in her later life that she had not attained the high honours she had once coveted is likely enough. No doubt she often expressed to her children her contempt for dazzling position, and her contentment with the humbler and happier life which had been her lot. That fox-and-grapes form of philosophical resignation has always been a solace to the old and disappointed.

Her son writes :

“If my beloved mother had been cursed with a single grain of artfulness or attracted by a silly ambition unconnected with more generous feelings and sentiments. . . she might by her power over the king's affections have baffled all the intrigues against her and ascended the British Throne.”

I respect the filial feeling which prompts these words, but I am inclined to doubt their accuracy. Perhaps Lady

Sarah felt that she had had her revenge when she acted as bridesmaid to the plain, homely, dowdy little princess who had supplanted her. Among the ten beautiful girls who, with heads crowned with diamonds and in robes of white velvet and silver, attended upon the royal bride, Lady Sarah by common consent bore away the palm. "Nothing," writes Horace Walpole, "ever looked so charming as Lady Sarah Lennox ; she had all the glow of beauty peculiar to the family."

Captain Napier tells us that: "The King appeared mentally absent but never took his eyes off Lady Sarah during the whole ceremony ; the Queen, then and ever after, was very gracious and attentive to my mother ; but, as all the young bridesmaids were drawn up in a line near her Majesty, with Lady Sarah at their head very richly dressed, Lord Westmorland, a very old Jacobite follower of the Pretender's who was purblind, and had never appeared at Court since the Hanoverian succession, was persuaded by his friends to honour the marriage of a *native* Monarch by his presence. Passing along the line of ladies, and seeing but dimly, he mistook my mother for the Queen, plumped down on his knees and took her hand to kiss ! She drew back startled, and deeply colouring, exclaimed, 'I am not the Queen, Sir.' The incident created a laugh and a little gossip ; and when George Selwyn heard of it he observed, 'Oh ! you know he always loved *Pretenders*.' "

Lady Sarah did not remain long without another

and less exalted suitor. Horace Walpole, writing on November 28th, 1761, a little more than two months after the royal marriage, says : " Lady Sarah Lennox has refused Lord Errol." In the following year, however, she gave her hand to Sir Thomas Charles Bunbury, a rich young Suffolk baronet, whose younger brother Henry William, the most popular caricaturist of his day, married Catherine Horneck (Goldsmith's " Little Comedy"), and who is best known to fame as the owner of Diomed, the first horse that won the Derby. He had only just attained his majority, but was already M.P. for Suffolk. Horace Walpole does not give a very flattering description of him. He speaks contemptuously of him as " Young Bunbury," and calls him a " chicken orator." And, indeed, his nerve wofully failed him in the House of Commons. He was to move an important question in the House, but when the time came he was afflicted with " Stage fright," and fled from the scene. Twice afterwards he failed to come to the scratch. " Nothing," says Horace Walpole, " was ever more childish than these scenes. To show himself more a man he is going to marry Lady Sarah Lennox, who is very pretty from exceeding bloom of youth : but as she has no features and her beauty is not likely to last as long as her betrothed's, he will probably repent this step like his ' motions.' "

That prophecy was fulfilled to a certain extent.

Sir Thomas Charles Bunbury *did* repent his marriage,

though not exactly for the reasons Horace Walpole suggests.

But, as marriages go, it was, for some time, at any rate, a happy one. Lady Sarah, writing to her friend Lady Susan Strangways more than a year after her wedding, says : " You have made a mighty pretty discovery, Miss, truly ! ' I can think,' you say, ' there is happiness in the country with a person one loves ! ' Pray now, who the devil would not be happy with a pretty place, a good house, good horses, greyhounds, etc., for hunting, so near Newmarket, what company we please in the house, and £2,000 a year to spend ? Add to this that I have a settled comfortable feel that I am doing so right, that all my friends love me and are with me as much as possible : in short, that I have not one thing on earth to be troubled about *on my own account* : pray now, where is the great oddity of that : or the wretch that would not be happy ? "

Three years later she writes of her country house at Barton : " I am settled at this sweet place, and *though I say it that should not say it*, it does look beautiful : you cannot think how improved it is. I have turned out some silver pheasants and they come and feed about the door with the peacocks : only think how pretty this is ! "

And she was as well satisfied with her husband as with her charming house.

" Believe me," she writes, after five years of wedded life, to Lady Susan (who in the interval had

married William O'Brien, the actor), "good husbands are not so common, at least I see none like my own and your description of yours, from which I reckon (*sic*) we are the 2 luckiest women breathing, and that we do not deserve it, if we are not thankful for such a blessing every day of our lives and that we can't reckon anything a real misfortune whilst we can be so happy at home. As for me I should be a monster of ingratitude if I ever made a single complaint, and did not thank God for making me the happiest of beings."

The general conception of Sir Charles Bunbury has, I think, always been that he had no thoughts or interests outside his racing stables, and cared far more for his thoroughbreds than for his wife. This was certainly not the case. He was fond of his wife and proud of her, as he had good reason to be, for her beauty and charm won the unqualified admiration of all who saw her. When she visited Paris in 1765, unlike the Countess of Coventry, whose mortification at her cold reception there I have described, Lady Sarah Bunbury's triumph was unquestionable.

"Oh, by the bye," she writes to Lord Holland, "I suppose my sister has told you how well we were received at Marli, and how we luckily saw the King and Royal Family, but she has not told you the Paris story which says that he embraced me twice and that one of the Seigneurs said, '*En vérité c'est trop, Sire.*' '*Je ne sais si c'est trop, mais je sais que ça me plaît,*' says the King. Is it not charming?"

There is nothing in Lady Sarah's confidential letters to her friend Lady Susan Strangways to indicate that Sir Charles was in the least jealous of the attentions paid to his wife by other men, though I doubt whether he would have relished reading such a passage as the following, in which Lady Sarah refers to her feelings for Stephen Fox, the eldest son of Lord Holland. "Ste. and I are grown very thick. . . . Poor Ste. is come to such an excess of deafness that it is quite melancholy and shocking. I can't bear it, for I do love him so very much that it goes to my heart to see him so."

But the feeling on both sides, in this case, was, I think, that of brother and sister, which is what can hardly be said of Lady Sarah's relations with others of her admirers, for she was a coquette to her finger-tips, and her flirtations were as audacious as they were numerous.

I detect "the little rift within the lute," which was slowly to widen till it broke up her married life, in her letters during the summer and autumn of 1767. Sir Charles had gone to Bath and afterwards to Spa, the then famous Belgian watering-place, to try the waters, as a cure for what Lady Sarah, with her usual noble scorn of orthography, calls "a complaint in his stomach." She did not accompany him, and confesses to Lady Susan that her spirits are "vastly lowered." It is evident that her flirtations had created some scandal, for Lady Susan took upon herself to remon-



strate with her on the stories which had reached her ears. In her reply Lady Sarah attempts to justify herself. "I must begin," she writes, "with thanking you for your kind, sensible, and gentle way of advising me. I am very conscious that the less a woman is talked of the better in general, and in particular on such subjects. I will not say it is my misfortune to have met with people envious of my happiness, and try to excuse myself by blaming others : no, I will own the truth. I have had the vanity to love general admiration and the folly to own it, which is, without doubt, reason sufficient for envious and abusive people, if there are such, to lay hold of and to blame me, with reason I confess, and therefore I forgive it them. I am only the more vexed every time I hear of it, and the more angry with myself, but I have but too often proved that my vanity entirely got the better of all my resolutions. . . . It would be much too long an argument to talk and justify myself (which I can do) of various things I have been blamed for, but be assured, my dear Netty, that my morals are not spoiled by the French. . . . That I have in every action of my life kept up to the very good education I have had is, I fear, too much for me to say. . . . I'm a weak, unsteady, thoughtless, vain creature, but still I do assure you it is not possible with a good heart (which I own I pique myself upon) to change so totally, without being a most miserable wretch. It is my first wish to make Sir Charles happy, and in that, if I may

believe him, I have succeeded beyond my hopes : my next is to keep the affection and esteem of my relations and friends. . . . I have not at present any guess of what or how you have heard of me. I know what might be the foundation of so many stories, but they must have been improved, I fancy, before they could reach so far. I do not desire to hear any more particulars of them, and will end this subject with begging of you not to be uneasy about my faults, which I fear will not mend, but to be content with knowing I'm happy."

But she was not happy ; one can read that between the lines of her letters. If, as her friends alleged, Sir Charles became so absorbed in his racing stables that he neglected his wife, it is probable that the fault was hers more than his. And, so far as it is possible to judge from her correspondence, I should surmise that the " stories " which had moved Lady Susan's remonstrances had alienated her husband's affections and driven him to the solace of sport.

Her admirers were many, but there was only one who really touched her heart, and to him she surrendered herself wholly. The man who was the object of her " one great passion " was her cousin, Lord William Gordon, son of the third Duke of Gordon. They were both of the same age, three-and-twenty, and were swept off their feet by the flood of a romantic and resistless passion. There is no mention of Lord William Gordon in any of Lady Sarah's published

letters—his name has been carefully suppressed and how or when the *liaison* commenced is matter of private knowledge only. Possibly this was one of the “stories” which had come to the ears of her friend and confidante. Overwhelmed with the burden of her shame, and too conscience-stricken to continue deceiving her husband as to the paternity of her child, Lady Sarah, as Lady Ilchester, in her *Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox*, briefly and baldly puts it, “in February 1769 left Sir Charles Bunbury’s house in Privy Gardens, taking with her Louisa Bunbury, her infant daughter, then two months old, and joined Lord William Gordon, to whom she was devotedly attached.”

They went first to Redbridge, not far from Southampton, and thence to Carolside, near Erlstone in Berwickshire. Thirty years ago there were old people living there who remembered the two lovers—the handsomest pair ever seen in those parts—and to this day their favourite walk along the banks of the Leader is known as “The Lovers’ Walk.” Their memory is preserved also in two thorn trees which they are said to have planted near the house—the stems and branches of which have become so closely intertwined that they look like one tree.

But the lives of the two lovers were not to be so olended. I do not know that Lady Sarah has left any record of her feelings during that brief spell of rapturous infatuation. Whatever letters she wrote for seven years after that passage in her life were destroyed by the

confidante to whom they were addressed. Whether the "stolen waters" were sweet, or whether they were soon changed into a Marah of bitterness, no one now knows. But, sweet or bitter, she had to expiate them by years of penitential solitude.

Three months the two passed together and then "the forcible representations of her family" compelled them to separate. The veil which hangs over the agony of their parting—for agony it must have been to both, in her case, if not in his, mingled with remorse and shame—is not to be lifted. But there must have been a deeper note of tragedy and pathos in the ending of this madness of passion, than the scant, matter-of-fact references to it by her biographer imply.

Lady Sarah found a refuge at Goodwood, where her brother Charles, third Duke of Richmond, built a house for her (Halnaker) from her own plans. There, under her maiden name, she lived for twelve years with her child in almost as complete seclusion as Hester Prynne, and if she wore no visible scarlet letter, it was not the less seared into her heart and branded upon her name.

Of Lord William Gordon nothing more is recorded beyond the facts of his marriage, twelve years later, in 1781, to Frances, daughter of Viscount Irvine, and his death in 1823.

It was not till nearly *seven years* after his wife's elopement that Sir Charles Bunbury obtained a divorce. The delay has never, so far as I know, been satisfactorily accounted for. Lady Sarah's friends have

attributed it to the fact that he wished to take his wife back again after a decent interval. She, at any rate, believed that he would, and was grievously disappointed that he did not.

On April 10th, 1776, she writes to Lady Susan O'Brien (*née* Strangways): "I do not know what you have heard about me, but I suppose of a divorce taking place now, which was begun long ago. This piece of news *is true* and I am not sorry for it, since Sir Charles has so positively affirmed that he *never did intend nor ever will* let me live with him again, which I flattered myself he would much longer than I ought to have done, if I had considered that his indifference towards me must grow stronger and stronger every day. I cannot but feel extremely sensible to the unpleasant renewal of this affair, and although I take care the newspapers shall not offend me by *never* looking at them, yet I suppose others do. . . . As to the report of my going to be married, I do assure you it is not true: if ever I do marry, I hope your remark, that it is most probable I shall be happy, will turn out true, for most undoubtedly nothing can possibly tempt any man or me to do so very imprudent a thing, but a great deal of affection indeed, which ought to be a security for happiness."

The divorce was granted on May 14th, 1776. That this unhappy episode in Lady Sarah's life should have been hushed up by her friends was of course only

natural. But it is most unfortunate that the suppression of Lord William Gordon's name should have led to the general belief that it was her second husband who was the cause of the dissolution of the first marriage. In more than one biographical sketch of Sir Charles Bunbury I have seen the statement that he sued for and obtained a divorce from his first wife on the ground of adultery with the Hon. George Napier, who afterwards married her. Such a mistake was natural enough to those who never thought of comparing dates and never heard Lady Sarah's name mentioned in connexion with that of any man but her first and second husbands. Until Lady Ilchester published her admirably annotated *Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox*, in 1901, to which all who take an interest in Lady Sarah are deeply indebted, there were few who knew the real facts, or had other than a hazy idea that Lady Sarah's divorce had something to do with the Colonel Napier whom she subsequently married.

But, whilst all misapprehension of Colonel Napier's position has been cleared away, I do not think that justice has been done to Sir Charles Bunbury's conduct to his wife. He has been represented as a mere racing man, with no thoughts above the stable, and utterly unfitted to be the husband of such a woman as Lady Sarah. This is quite a false estimate of his character. He was a sportsman of a high type, a man of ability, sense, and strong determination, one of the three great Dicta-

tors of the Turf, the compeer of Lord George Bentinck and Admiral Rous. He was one of the three Stewards of the Jockey Club appointed to investigate the celebrated "Escape scandal," when the Prince of Wales's jockey, Sam Chiffney, was charged with pulling his royal master's horse in a race at Newmarket. The prince (afterwards George IV.) stood by his jockey, and threatened to retire from the Turf if the verdict were against him. But Sir Charles was not the man to be browbeaten, even by Royalty. He told the prince plainly that, if Chiffney were suffered to ride His Royal Highness's horses again, no gentleman would start against him, and H.R.H., in high dudgeon, sold off his stud and withdrew from the Turf.

A fearless, independent man, this baronet, with all the instincts of a true gentleman and sportsman. His behaviour to his wife was throughout manly and generous. He treated her, indeed, better than she deserved, and in all her letters she never has a word to say in his disparagement.

In one remarkable letter, written three years after her divorce, she tells Lady Susan O'Brien of her first interview with Sir Charles since the marriage had been dissolved.

"I hope you won't laugh at me for the wish I have long had to see Sir Charles again. I hope my dear Lady Susan knows me well enough to comprehend that I never could return all the goodness of Sir Charles to me by the least grain of dislike : I was *indifferent*,

and that has always been the cause of my ingratitude which never proceeded from anger or dislike : with this same indifference as to love, I have always had an interest in everything that concerned him, and never felt satisfied not to have received his pardon. When I was in town last he was there too, and wrote to ask to see me : I was delighted at the offer, and accepted it. The first day I saw him, I was too much overcome to have the least conversation with him, but his extreme delicacy in avoiding to give the least hint about my conduct and the ingenious manner in which he contrived to give me comfort by talking of Lady Derby's conduct, just as I should wish him to talk about mine, did at last restore my spirits in some degree, and when he came the next day to see me I had a very long conversation with him, during which, without naming my faults or the word forgiveness, he contrived to convince me that he looked upon me as his friend, and one whose friendship he was pleased with. I cannot describe to you how light my heart has felt since this meeting. . . .

“He said he saw no sort of reason why he might not see me just when he pleased, nor why it was to put me out of countenance. I could not *argue* that point with him, but I told him how glad I was that he could see me with such good-humour, to which he answered, ‘Why should I not? You know I am not apt to bear malice!’ This set me into such a fit of crying again that he told me I *drove* him from me, and that if his



earnest wish to see me happy and comfortable only made me reproach myself he would keep away : and so we parted the best of friends in the world, but it is very true that every mark of his forgiveness is like a dagger in my heart."

Who will deny that Sir Charles in those interviews proved himself a true and chivalrous gentleman? Was there ever a meeting between a divorced husband and wife in which the one wronged displayed so much delicacy and magnanimity? He was not even ashamed to extend his affectionate sympathy to the child which was hers but not his, though it bore his name. "He has shown," writes Lady Sarah, "all sorts of kindness to my dear little Louisa, whom he told me he liked vastly, and has invited her to come to him whenever she is in town."

Here is a man to admire, and it rouses my indignation to find him stigmatised as a coarse and unfeeling boor, who, by neglecting his wife for his race-horses, drove her into the arms of a seducer. Her own weakness and folly and love of admiration, to which she so frankly confesses, were the true causes of her fall. For it was not until after she had passed through the furnace of remorse and repentance that her character came out, purged from dross, in all the beauty of its pure gold.

More than five years had passed since her divorce when Lady Sarah's lonely life at Goodwood was once more invaded by romance. She had some

years before made the acquaintance of Captain the Hon. George Napier, an officer in her brother George's regiment. He was then married, but lost his wife in New York whilst he was campaigning in America. When he came back to England, a widower, he met Lady Sarah once more. She still retained much of her beauty, though she was now in her thirty-ninth year, and he, like his son Sir William in later days, was the handsomest man of his time in the British Army. He stood six feet two inches, and was "faultless in figure and features." In person and character he was everything that a suitor should be, but, poor enough to begin with, he had impoverished himself further by marrying a wife no richer than himself. He proposed and was accepted. In breaking the news to her dear friend Lady Susan O'Brien, Lady Sarah writes : "You would hardly believe, my dear, that a man who has had reason to know the distresses of poverty and the inconveniences of marriage, should choose to put himself in the same situation again ; and you will think still worse of his sense for the choice he has made of *me*, for most undoubtedly there is in all marriages a thousand to one they will turn out ill, and in mine ten thousand to one against us : but no one argument that has been urged to Mr. Napier has had the least effect upon his determined purpose. He says he has known me long enough to judge of my character, that he has a peculiar turn of mind which prevents him being mortified about my character, that he don't marry me

out of vanity to brag of my merits, but because he is convinced that my character and disposition, such as it is, suits him, and that if I love him he has not the least doubt of our being happy. He knows I *do* love him, and, being certain of that, he laughs at every objection that is started, for he says that, loving me to the degree he does, he is quite sure never to repent marrying me, because he has so thoroughly considered over the evident objections to it : that it is not a new thought, for that from the first moment he knew me he wondered nobody had thought of proposing to me."

A masterful soldierly wooer this, who would not be denied ; the sort of lover that takes a woman's heart by storm, whom she loves none the less because he carries with him the assured air of a conqueror.

But the marriage met with opposition. The Duke of Richmond and others of her family disapproved of it strongly. Lady Susan O'Brien, too, was on the side of the opposition. "I can't help feeling hurt," she writes, "at your marrying again : there was a propriety in your retreat, and a dignity annexed to the idea of *one great passion*, tho' unfortunately placed, that gratified your friends and silenced your enemies. I have so often heard you praised and admired for not marrying again, and giving up your time to your daughter, that I grieve that you should change a plan, the only one in the world that perhaps could thoroughly reinstate you in the good opinion and esteem of every body."

But Colonel Napier's determination bore down

all opposition and Lady Sarah became his wife on August 27th, 1781. In the highest and best form of happiness, steadfast and unbroken mutual affection, their marriage was a happy one. But they had many trials and sorrows. They were always harassed by poverty. With a family of eight children, five of them sons, and an income which never exceeded and often fell considerably short of £800 a year, they were hard pressed to make both ends meet. For the education of the sons alone absorbed more than half their means, and life has not much romance in it for persons in their rank doomed to the galling humiliations of "genteel poverty."

But, in the adoration of her children and her own pride in the distinguished careers of her splendid sons, Lady Sarah had ample compensation for the hard blows which Fortune dealt her. And she had need of such consolation, for her husband, the stay of her life for three-and-twenty years, died in 1804, and even the love of all her children hardly sustained her in her broken-hearted desolation.

When the king was informed that Colonel Napier, whose public services had been inadequately recognised in his lifetime, had left his widow with straitened means, His Majesty granted Lady Sarah a pension of £800 per annum, £300 to herself and £500 among her four girls. Her friends had worked hard to procure her this pension, and writing to Lady Susan O'Brien, she says: "Most handsomely done, indeed,

in your friend, Mr. Pitt, not to speak of the King & Co."

Lady Sarah, thus comfortably provided for, survived her husband nearly twenty years and lived to the great age of eighty-eight. To the very last she preserved the singular beauty of her complexion, but she was quite blind for many years previous to her death, which took place on August 20th, 1826. Amongst the papers in Holland House there was found a few years ago a note in the handwriting of the Honourable George Tierney, sometime Treasurer of the Navy and Master of the Mint, who is, perhaps, best remembered now for his duel with William Pitt in 1796. I subjoin the note, which gives the pathetic sequel to the loves of Lady Sarah and George III.

"I attended St. James's Church in the spring of the year 1814 to hear a Charity Sermon preached by the Dean of Canterbury, Dr. Andrews, for the benefit of an Infirmary established for the cure of diseases of the eye. In the conclusion of his discourse the Dean described the origin and object of that Institution, and stated it to have been established about the time when His Majesty's sight began to fail, and to have been sanctioned and supported by His Royal protection, from a sense of the miseries he began to experience from the loss of sight, and a charitable desire to prevent (particularly amongst

the poorer classes of his subjects) the progress of so severe a calamity.

“The impressive eloquence by which Dr. Andrews is distinguished was powerfully exerted on this occasion, and the effect of the Eulogium pronounced on the King was heightened by the recollection that His Majesty was at that time, in addition to his other infirmities, totally and incurably blind.

“On the seat immediately before me sat an elderly lady who appeared to be deeply affected by the whole of this part of the discourse. She wept much, and as she evidently took a more than ordinary interest in all she heard, she attracted my notice in no slight degree, and the more so, when, the service being concluded, I observed that she herself was quite helpless from the entire loss of sight, and was obliged to be led out of Church. You may ask why I have introduced this account at the close of a political memoir to which it seems to have so little reference, but I think you will acknowledge that I have not acted altogether without cause when I tell you that the tears which I saw thus shed in commiseration to the sufferings of the King, fell from the eyes of the very Lady Sarah, whose early influence over His Majesty’s affections, the preceding pages record.

“G. T.”

As Lady Susan Strangways figures largely in the life of Lady Sarah Lennox, and was, for seventy

years her closest friend and confidante, some particulars of her subsequent life may not be uninteresting. It will be gathered from the letter of Horace Walpole, already quoted, that Lady Susan had a taste for theatricals, and probably this led to her making the acquaintance of William O'Brien, a well-known actor, who had made his mark at Covent Garden under David Garrick. O'Brien was a man of education and of remarkably gentlemanly bearing. He came of a good old Irish family and was admitted to the houses of many persons of high social position. When Lady Susan first made his acquaintance is not stated, but for eighteen months the pair met and corresponded clandestinely. So perfectly did O'Brien counterfeit the handwriting of Lady Sarah Bunbury that Lord Ilchester himself frequently delivered letters to his daughter from her lover, under the impression that they were from her old friend. None of the family had the slightest notion of the intrigue until a week before the dénouement, which Horace Walpole thus describes :

“Lord Cathcart went to Miss Read’s, the paintress. She said softly to him : ‘My lord, there is a couple in the next room that I am sure ought not to be together ; I trust your lordship will look in ! He did and shut the door again and went directly and informed Lord Ilchester. Lady Susan was examined, flung herself at her father’s feet, confessed all, vowed to break off—but—what a *but* !—desired to see the



*From the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds.*

LADY SARAH LENNOX, LADY SUSAN FOX, AND CHARLES JAMES FOX.





loved object and take a last leave. You will be amazed, even this was granted. The parting scene happened the beginning of the week. On Friday she came of age and on Saturday morning—instead of being under lock and key in the country—walked downstairs, took her footman, and said she was going to breakfast with Lady Sarah, but would call at Miss Read's : in the street pretended to recollect a particular cap in which she was to be drawn, and sent the footman back for it, slipped into a hackney chair, was married at Covent Garden Church, and set out for Mr. O'Brien's villa at Dunstable. . . . Poor Lord Ilchester is almost distracted ; indeed it is the completion of disgrace—even a footman were preferable ; the publicity of the hero's profession perpetuates the mortification. I could not have believed that Lady Susan would have stooped so low."

Of course Lord Ilchester could not allow the husband of his daughter to remain on the stage. An appointment therefore was procured for O'Brien, first in Canada, and then in Jamaica. In this genteel exile Lady Susan expiated her crime until, after the lapse of seven years, her aristocratic relatives consented to her return. To the surprise of her friends and relations her marriage was a particularly happy one. Mr. O'Brien was of the true Irish temperament, mercurial and thriftless, a curious combination of restlessness and indolence, but possessed of unfailing good temper and strong affections. He loved his wife sincerely and she

was devoted to him. And though they were sorely tried by poverty, their lives were sweetened by a love which no hardships or disappointments could sour. After many vicissitudes O'Brien was at last appointed Receiver-General of Dorsetshire, and settled in that county, where he died in 1806. His wife survived him for twelve years. Both of them lie buried, side by side, in the village churchyard of Stinsford, and it is pleasing to know that the Ilchester family raised no objection to Lady Susan's "perpetuating the mortification" of her misalliance by being laid in the same grave with an actor.

## CHAPTER XI

### A POLITICAL SIREN

IT seems to me that the charming women of the eighteenth century made more political, if not more social, capital out of their beauty and charms than the no doubt equally charming professional beauties of our own time. Perhaps a greater laxity in manners enabled them to do what their sisters of to-day are afraid to do. But, in any case, where is the lovely woman now living whose beauty has been of such practical service to her party as was that of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, or Mrs. Crewe? Either of these two could have been trusted to win an election off her own bat, if so masculine a simile be permissible in speaking of ladies. It is true that these eighteenth-century beauties had other attractions besides good looks. They were witty, audacious, reckless, and their tongues were as eloquent as their eyes—they were past-masters of every art by which the human male can be allured and fascinated—they knew how to win the heart of a butcher or a crossing-sweeper as well as that of a prince or a duke, and they prided themselves on their ability to cozen a vote

out of the humblest elector or a place out of the most obdurate minister. They were not content with displaying their charms, their diamonds, and their dresses at great State ceremonies or fashionable Society functions—they were ready and eager to take a hand in the actual fighting—they were the irregular light cavalry of the army to which they attached themselves, and their dashing charges often did more damage to their enemies and more service to their friends than the organised attack of the heavier battalions. It would, indeed, be difficult to over-rate their influence in the political warfare of a hundred and twenty years ago.

They were not above showing their beautiful faces and rustling their gorgeous silks in the lowest courts and alleys—the squalid haunts of poverty and vagabondism. A venerable voter, who had taken part in the great Westminster Election of 1784, gave Allan Cunningham this description of the methods of these fair canvassers : “ Lord, sir ! it was a fine sight to see a grand lady come right smack up to us with, ‘ Master, how d’ye do ? ’ and laugh so loud, and speak so kind, and shake us by the hand and say, ‘ Give us your vote, worthy sir—a plumper for the people’s friend, our friend, everybody’s friend.’ And then, sir, if we hemmed and hawed, they’d ask us for our wives and children ; and if that wouldn’t do, they’d think nothing of a kiss—ay ! a dozen or so. Kissing was nothing to them, and it all came so natural.”

No wonder such canvassing was successful! But what lady nowadays would thus "stoop to conquer" for her party? What beautiful woman is there now capable of such a display of heroism and devotion in any political cause?

In the foremost rank of these political Amazons stood Frances Anne, Lady Crewe, who was by general consent admitted to be the most beautiful woman of her time. In writing of any other beautiful women the gossips and diarists of the period, Horace Walpole, Fanny Burney, Nathaniel Wraxall, and the rest of them almost invariably except Mrs. Crewe (her title came later in life) from all comparison.

"The elegance of Mrs. Sheridan's beauty is unequalled by any one I ever saw, *except Mrs. Crewe*," writes Fanny Burney. And you will find this exception generally made in estimating the personal charms of any new claimant to the admiration of Society.

Mrs. Crewe was the daughter of Fulke Greville, sometime Envoy-extraordinary to the Elector of Bavaria, and a man of note in the diplomatic world. In 1776 she married Mr. John Crewe, who, for his steady, stolid support of the Whigs, was raised to the Peerage as Baron Crewe in 1806. Like many other charming and lively women, Mrs. Crewe was mated with a dull husband. During his long career in the House of Commons, Mr. Crewe seldom opened his mouth, except to applaud the

orators of his party, but he could always be trusted to vote straight, and, for the rest, his wife had brilliancy enough and to spare for the two of them. She gathered round her the cleverest and most celebrated men of her day. Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Canning, were frequent visitors both at Crewe Hall, her stately Cheshire seat, and at her pretty villa at Hampstead. And Mrs. Crewe was the most delightful of châtelines. She had an insatiable thirst for amusement, but it was her greatest pleasure to make others share in her amusement. Her house-parties at Crewe Hall were the gayest and merriest in England. The amateur theatricals there were the best in the three kingdoms, and gained quite a celebrity in Society. It sounds strange that the manager of the plays at Crewe Hall should have been the head gamekeeper, but it is a fact that the entire control of the stage was placed in the hands of Thomas Fawcett, who for more than thirty years watched over the preserves on the Crewe estates. He was a brother of Charles Fawcett, "the celebrated actor in genteel comedy," and both he and his wife were excellent actors. Some of their children, too, inherited the histrionic talent of their parents, and the eldest son, Charles, made his name as a sterling leading actor in the provinces.

Another notable assistant at the Crewe Hall theatricals, was Miss Fanny Hesketh, afterwards the wife of General Vyse, M.P., who gained some notoriety as

an explorer of the Pyramids. He saw Miss Hesketh first as "Miranda" in *The Tempest* at Crewe Hall, and fell in love with her on the spot. This was not surprising when we consider that Sir Thomas Lawrence, who also saw her in that character, was so enchanted with her sylph-like figure, her lovely face, and magnificent glossy black hair, that he could not rest until he had painted her portrait as the simple and charming daughter of "Prospero."

In the summer and autumn, Mrs. Crewe had outdoor amusements for her guests at Crewe Hall, which were, perhaps, even more delightful than the plays. There was a bijou cottage *orné* on Philip's Hill in the park, where there were merry breakfast parties and still merrier little suppers. There was a dairy farm at Crewe Green, to which, after a very late session, the whole house party would repair to cool their palates with milk fresh and warm from the cow, or delicious cream and junkets—there were jolly boating picnics on the lake—and there was always the beautiful and charming hostess, the very sight of whose face and sound of whose voice made old folks young, and turned staid folks into madcaps. There is still preserved the album, to which each guest was expected to contribute some effusion in verse descriptive of his visit. I have seen a number of them, all more or less eulogistic of the beautiful hostess, and some, notably those from George Canning's pen, really clever and witty.



In my sketch of the Linleys I have alluded to the fascination which Mrs. Crewe exercised over Richard Brinsley Sheridan. The Sheridans were on intimate terms with the Crewes, and Mrs. Sheridan's letters contain constant references to her visits to Crewe Hall. It was not, however, till the intimacy had lasted some years, that Mrs. Sheridan had any grounds for jealousy. Mr. Fraser Rae, whose *Life of Sheridan*, though not impartial, is by far the best which has yet appeared, says :

“That Mrs. Sheridan had reason to lament her husband's infidelity is unquestionable, while it can be shown that his backsliding did not last long, and that his repentance was sincere and lasting. Elizabeth Sheridan has preserved the facts, and it is better to publish them than suffer conjecture to run riot. She wrote to Mrs. Lefanu as follows, on November 27th, 1788, from her brother's house in Bruton Street : ‘As to your questions concerning Mrs. Crewe and Mrs. Bouverie, I cannot entirely satisfy you, as I do not know the cause of their difference. That Mrs. Crewe hates Mrs. B. is certain, and to such a degree as to be distressed if they accidentally meet. Mrs. B. neither seeks nor avoids her, and from what has dropped from Mrs. Sheridan, I fancy she is the injured person of the two. Some love affair I believe to be the origin of the quarrel. As to Mrs. Crewe's coldness with regard to Mrs. S., it is partly jealousy of Mrs. B., to whom Mrs. S.

gives the preference. You must also know that Mrs. Crewe, among other lovers (favoured ones, I mean), has had our brother in her train. As his fame and consequence in life have increased, her charms have diminished, and, passion no longer the tie between them, his affection, esteem, and attention returned to their proper channel, and he never has seemed, or I believe never was in truth, so much attached to his wife as of late, and this her *dear friend* cannot bear, and Mrs. S. tells me that while they were at Crewe Hall, she took little pains to conceal her jealousy.' ”

Now that phrase “favoured” would seem to imply that the relations between Sheridan and Mrs. Crewe were something more than Platonic. But there is no warrant for such an implication. Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi, who, like all good women, had a keen eye for the infirmities of her sisters, especially the beautiful ones, thus emphatically states *her* opinion of Mrs. Crewe : “He (Charles James Fox) preferred Mrs. (now Lady) Crewe to all women living, but Lady Crewe never lost an atom of character—I mean female honour. She loved high play and dissipation, but was no sensualist.” But even this charge of gambling was unfounded, for I learn, on other authority, that Lady Crewe, so far from loving high play, rarely touched a card. And Lady Sarah Lennox, describing a visit to Crewe Hall in one of her letters, says : “Mrs. Crewe and I, who don't love cards or backgammon, used to sit and talk over old stories.”

Every one who has read the *School for Scandal* is, I presume, familiar with the fulsome dedication addressed to Mrs. Crewe. It is difficult to imagine any sensible woman being other than disgusted with such nauseous flattery. But the beauties of that day (and perhaps of all days) had a "grand capawcity" for swallowing adulation—the thickest mixture of honey and molasses could not sicken them. Sheridan, no doubt, was well aware of this, and therefore had no hesitation in laying the butter and sugar on thick—too thick to be sincere. Mrs. Crewe I suppose found it pleasant to be thus lauded by the most brilliant wit of his day—it made the other women jealous, if it did not exactly commend itself to her own taste, and it was hardly to be expected that she should forbear from dragging, chained to her chariot wheels, this notable captive of her *beaux yeux*. But beyond that natural exhibition of her triumph there is no good reason to suppose that she ever went, either in the case of Sheridan or Fox. The latter, by the way, had forestalled Sheridan in giving expression to his admiration of Mrs. Crewe in verse. As the lines are not generally known I make no apology for quoting them.

May 27th, 1775.

TO MRS. CREWE.

BY THE HONOURABLE CHARLES FOX.

Where the loveliest expression to feature is joined,  
By Nature's most delicate pencil design'd,  
Where Blushes unbidden, and Smiles without Art,  
Speak the sweetness and feeling that dwell in the heart ;

Where in Manners enchanting no Blemish we trace,  
But the Soul keeps the promise we had from the Face,  
Sure Philosophy, Reason, and Coldness must prove  
Defences unequal to shield us from Love.  
Then tell me, mysterious Enchanter, O tell  
By what wonderful Art, or by what magic Spell,  
My heart is so fenced that for once I am wise  
And gaze without madness on Amoret's eyes:  
That my Wishes, which never were bounded before,  
Are here bounded by Friendship, and ask for no more.  
Is it Reason? No, that my whole life will belie,  
For who so at variance as Reason and I?  
Is't Ambition that fills up each Chink of my Heart,  
Nor allows to one softer Sensation a Part?  
Ah! no; for in this all the world must agree,  
That one Folly was never sufficient for me.  
Is my Mind on distress so intensely employed?  
Or by Pleasure relaxed or Variety cloy'd?  
For, alike in this only, Enjoyment and Pain  
Both slacken the Spring of the nerves which they strain.  
That I've felt each reverse that from Fortune can flow,  
That I've tasted each Bliss which the Happiest know,  
Has still been the Whimsical Fate of my Life,  
Where Anguish and Joy have been ever at Strife.  
But, though versed in th' extremes both of Pleasure and Pain,  
I am still but too ready to feel them again.  
If then for this once in my life I am free,  
And escape from a Snare might catch wiser than me,  
'Tis that Beauty alone but imperfectly charms,  
For though Brightness may dazzle, 'tis kindness that warms.  
As on Suns in the Winter with Pleasure we gaze,  
But feel not their force, though their Splendour we praise;  
So Beauty our just Admiration may claim,  
But Love, and Love only, our Hearts can inflame.

Mrs. Crewe's admiration for Fox was as profound and as ardent as that of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, and nobly both ladies proved the sincerity of their devotion to the great Whig Statesman at the

memorable election for Westminster in 1784, when, as Macaulay says, "with lips more eloquent and persuasive than those of Fox himself they carried the election against Palace and Treasury." The story of that fierce and exciting political battle I have told in my sketch of the Duchess of Devonshire.<sup>1</sup> I will only add that Mrs. Crewe was not less indefatigable than her Grace in her exertions to secure the return of Charles James Fox. If she had not the dash and abandon of the duchess, she was far more beautiful, and knew how to make her beauty captivating to the roughest and coarsest denizen of the slums. The sturdiest and most independent of voters could not hold out long before the pleading of that soft, musical voice and those bewitching long-lashed eyes.

There is a portrait of Mrs. Crewe by Sir Joshua Reynolds in which she is represented as a shepherdess, with eyes looking down upon a book, and full effect is thus given to those long, dark, expressive eyelashes which were one of the most striking features of her lovely face. As one looks at them in the exquisite picture one can understand how the heart of the most obdurate male must have melted before the glance of the glorious eyes which those wonderful lashes could veil and unveil so effectively.

Fox's great triumph was celebrated on the morning of May 18th, 1784, by an entertainment given by the Prince of Wales at Carlton House—for the prince

<sup>1</sup> *Dainty Dames of Society*, vol. i.

was then in open revolt against his father (George III.) and had thrown in his lot with the Whigs. It was a splendid function, and the guests included all the most distinguished men and women of the party. But it was eclipsed, if not in splendour, at any rate in enthusiasm, by the supper given the same night at the Crewes' residence in Lower Grosvenor Street. It is significant that the banquet is spoken of as "Mrs. Crewe's Banquet" ; her husband is quite ignored and was no doubt contented to be so in the presence of his queenly spouse. It was a brilliant company that gathered round the supper table at the head of which sat the most beautiful woman in England. The Duchess of Devonshire was there in all the plenitude of her florid charms and many other fair women who had fought with her for the success of the Whigs. Burke and Fox and Sheridan were there. But the guest of the evening, whose presence gave the hostess more pride, perhaps, than that of any other, except the hero of the victory, was the Prince of Wales, then a young man of two-and-twenty, handsome, affable, engaging, a favourite with men and women alike. It was he who, rising and looking round upon the company, all like himself habited in buff and blue, the party colours, raised his glass and proposed the toast of the evening :

Buff and blue  
And Mrs. Crewe.

The cheers and jingling of glasses with which the

toast was received had hardly died away when Mrs. Crewe, rising glass in hand, with a dainty curtsy and an expression of charming archness responded :

Buff and blue  
And all of you.

And the neatness and promptitude of the reply evoked enthusiastic applause.

Two years later we have a picture of Mrs. Crewe from the pen of Sir Gilbert Elliot, afterwards first Earl of Minto. Here is an extract from one of his letters in which he gives a not altogether flattering portrait of the famous beauty :

“PARK STREET :

“*July 4th, 1786.*

“... I rode to Beaconsfield on Sunday, and found Mrs. Crewe, Windham, young Burke, and a Mr. Adie. I have got into a certain degree of intimacy now with Mrs. Crewe, and find her, like ninety-nine in a hundred—a mixture of good and bad. I mean only in respect to agreeableness and sense, for I know no bad of her in any other acceptation of the word. She likes good conversation—takes an interest, and even a share, in all subjects which men would naturally talk of when not in women’s company—as politics and literature ; and she likes arguments and discussions of all sorts. She seems to have a clear understanding, and a good deal of refinement and ingenuity in her own ideas. All this is good. On the other hand, she is certainly not without a degree

of pedantry and *over-refinement*. She betrays as much vanity and desire of admiration in her pursuit of *male* conversation, as real taste and genuine pleasure in it; in short, she seems to be struggling to maintain the same place and consequence by wit and conversation which she once held as a beauty; and for a wife, or one to live constantly with—begging your pardon—you know I always protested against a professed beauty, and so I do against a professed wit, but more especially a professed wit grown out of a professed beauty.

“... I do not, however, like to abuse wit, for certainly the fault of our women is to have too little conversation which can possibly interest men; and I have hitherto always found Mrs. Crewe very pleasant company. I am going with her to-day to Dr. Bell, one of the magnetising quacks, and the first whom I shall have seen. Lady Palmerston, Mrs. Crewe, Mrs. Sheridan, and Miss Crewe have been twice at Mainaduc's. They were all infidels the first day, except Mrs. Crewe, who seemed staggered a little by the number and variety of the people she saw affected by the *crisis*. The next time, Mrs. Sheridan and Miss Crewe were both magnetised, and both had what is called a ‘*crisis*’—that is, they both fell into a sort of trance or waking sleep in which they could hear what passed, but had no power of speaking or moving, and they describe it as very like the effect of laudanum. From what I have heard I am really



disposed to believe that these people have some means or other of producing a sort of stupor or sleep, but whether by magnetism or any other means, I know nothing about. And on this little portion of truth they build all the rest of the absurd fictions with which we are amused."

There is no new thing under the sun and no class of Society changes less in its amusements, its follies, its vices than what the latest slang dubs the "Smart Set." What Father Bernard Vaughan denounces to-day was denounced in almost identical phrases a hundred years ago. The same forms of humbug were patronised by the silly and credulous then as now. Nor do the modern Cagliostros and Nostradamuses seem to have made much advance upon the methods of their predecessors of the eighteenth century. Their "manifestations" smack as strongly of the tricks of the prestidigitator as ever.

On two or three other occasions Sir Gilbert alludes to Mrs. Crewe's habit of "refining and double-refining" in her "mumbling conversations" with him. But he admits that he found these confidential talks entertaining. To sit close to the owner of those glorious eyes and bewitching eyelashes and listen to her soft voice, lowered for his special behoof, was an experience which Sir Gilbert had no objection to renewing as often as the opportunity was afforded him.

In the year 1796 the Prince of Wales was separated from the princess, whose wrongs, as Queen Caroline,

five-and-twenty years later roused the indignation of the whole English nation. After the separation the princess lived for a while at Blackheath, where Mrs. Crewe was one of her many intimates. Her Royal Highness was by disposition a Bohemian and delighted in shocking Mrs. Grundy and the proprieties. For some time, however, she conducted herself with irreproachable circumspection. But she soon grew tired of being good, and made no secret of her distaste for the monotony of the respectable life to which she was condemned.

In 1799, however, some more lively elements were introduced into the society of Blackheath; and the princess, full of high spirits, unrestrained by any sense of prudence or discretion, allowed the tone of her entourage to become so lax and free, that dignity and decorum were flung to the winds. Little games were instituted after dinner, and kept up till the small hours of the morning. Of those invited to dinner, some were made to stay to supper, and others till sandwiches appeared, which they apparently did about cock-crow. Those who cared for her became seriously distressed at the opportunities thus recklessly given to malignant scandal. Fortunately for the princess, the most agreeable and distinguished of her associates had her interests at heart, and were infinitely more sensitive to the dangers she incurred than she was herself. With such men as Grey, Canning, Frere, Spencer, and with such ladies as those of the North family she was

safe enough ; but they were seriously alarmed by her indiscretions, and they confided their consternation to Mr. Pitt, who, though concerned, was, it was surmised, a little amused, and not a little curious to see for himself what went on. He had not long to wait ; and a certain Sunday dinner at Blackheath, in August, 1799, at which the Premier was present, is thus described by Sir Gilbert Elliot :

“The Chancellor, Mr. Pitt, Mr. Dundas, Mr. Douglas, Lady Katherine and Lady Charlotte North, Mrs. Crewe and Emma Crewe, George Canning, Mr. Frere, and Mr. Long dined here last Sunday ; and we *did* play at musical magic. Mr. Dundas was made, by the power of music, to kiss Miss Emma’s hand, on his knees ; Lady Charlotte was to present the Queen of Prussia’s bust to Mr. Pitt, and make him kiss it, which after some difficulty he performed. The Princess was to tie Mr. Long and Mr. Frere together, and make each nurse a bolster as a baby. Mrs. Crewe, with all her caution, was the most frisky in the company, which amazed some of us much ; but the most charming part of all was that of Mr. Dundas. I do not think he could be tipsy, for I sat by him at dinner, and saw no excess, but he squeezed the Princess’s hand in the tenderest manner possible, called her ‘angel’ repeatedly, and said he hoped no one but himself would know how much he loved her. What can the old thing mean ? It diverts us extremely ; but he is in high favour,

and the Princess dines with him on Sunday to meet the Premier. He was charming on Sunday, and Lady Cholmondely and Miss Garth, to whom he was beau, were captivated. When Blind Man's Bluff was proposed to him (not in earnest, I believe), he said, 'I will endeavour to shut my eyes if I can, but I cannot promise the rest of the world will do the same.' The playful manner of his saying this delighted the Princess."

Among the many notable people whom Mrs. Crewe numbered among her friends were Dr. Burney and his distinguished daughter Fanny. The doctor, in one of his letters to Fanny, gives an instance of Mrs. Crewe's charity and benevolence. "Mrs. C.," he writes, "having seen at Eastbourne a number of venerable and amiable French clergy suffering all the evils of banishment and beggary with silent resignation, has for some time had in meditation a plan for procuring some addition to the small amount the Committee at Freemasons' Hall is able to allow from the residue of the subscriptions and briefs in their favour."

Into this charitable scheme Mrs. Crewe threw herself with her accustomed energy. She gave the doctor no rest until he had promised to ask his daughter to support the project by her powerful pen. So Fanny wrote an *Address to the Ladies of Great Britain*, appealing for aid, and her appeal brought in many subscriptions.

In later years Fanny Burney saw a great deal of

Mrs. (then Lady) Crewe and has constant references to her in her Diary and correspondence. I shall select two of the most interesting. Writing to Dr. Burney, under date May 11th, 1813, Madame D'Arblay (she was married in 1793) says: "I found Lady Crewe at home and in her best style, cordial as well as good-humoured and abounding in odd and acute remarks. I had also the good fortune to see my lord, who seems always pleasing, unaffected, and sensible, and to possess a share of innate modesty that no intercourse with the world, nor addition of years, can rob him of."

Lady Sarah Lennox had a similar high opinion of Mr. Crewe, but, though she was very fond of Mrs. Crewe, she saw faults in her which apparently escaped the notice of Fanny Burney. "She is," writes Lady Sarah, "amiable, has most excellent ideas, with the purest principles of everything that is good, but it is all so *jumbled* in her little, puzzled pate, that I do assure you her company is by no means pleasant, except for a short time when one has nothing else to think of but to hear her little chat and laugh at her odd way of expressing it. She is, however, grown to see that Mr. Crewe's dry laconic sense is worth all her sentimental ideas and she looks up to his opinions, and adopts them with a degree of satisfaction that rejoices me."

In the following year Dr. Burney died, to the great grief of his daughter, who was most tenderly attached

to him. Not long after his death Madame D'Arblay was presented to Louis XVIII., then a refugee in England, at a drawing-room, held by the Duchess of Angoulême in her London hotel. Lady Crewe accompanied her, and Fanny gives the following amusing description of their adventures on the occasion :—

“Lady Crewe purposed taking this opportunity of paying her own respects, with her congratulations to Madame la Duchesse d'Angoulême. She had sent me a note from Madame de Gouville, relative to the time for presentation, which was to take place at Grillon's Hotel in Albemarle Street.

“We went early to avoid a crowd. But Albemarle Street was already quite full, though quiet. We entered the hotel without difficulty, Lady Crewe having previously demanded a private room of Grillon, who had once been cook to her lord. This private room was at the back of the house, with a mere yard or common garden for its prospect. Lady Crewe declared this was quite too stupid, and rang the bell for waiter after waiter, till she made M. Grillon come himself. She then in her singularly open and easy manner told him to be so good as to order us a front room where we might watch for the arrival of the royals, and be amused at the same time by seeing the entrances of the mayor, aldermen, and common councilmen, and *other odd characters* who would be coming to pay their court to these French princes and princesses.

“M. Grillon gave a nod of acquiescence and we were

instantly shown to a front apartment just over the street door, which was fortunately supplied with a balcony.

"I should have been much entertained by all this, and particularly with the originality, good-humour, and intrepid yet intelligent odd fearlessness of all remark, or even consequence, which led Lady Crewe to both say and do exactly what she pleased, had my heart been lighter; but it was too heavy for pleasure, and the depth of my mourning, and the little but sad time that was yet passed since it became my gloomy garb, made me hold it a matter even of decency as well as of feeling, to keep out of sight. I left Lady Crewe therefore to the full enjoyment of her odd figures, while I seated myself, solitarily, at the further end of the room."

This is the last glimpse of Lady Crewe that remains to us.

Four years later, on December 23rd, 1818, after a long and painful illness, the brilliant queen of beauty died. The only reference to her death which I have been able to find is the following in a letter written by Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi to Sir James Fellowes from Bath on January 12th, 1819:

"Apropos, poor Lady Crewe is dead—an object of deformity! The greatest beauty of her time: 'at least the most admired woman: 'whose mind kept the promise was made by her face,' as Charles Fox said and sung. But palsy shook her frame and cancer gnawed it."

It is a melancholy picture and one does not care to dwell upon it, still less to moralise as Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi would have us do. "All flesh is grass: and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." The moral is "something musty." I prefer to turn my gaze from the sad spectacle of decay and, looking at Sir Joshua's exquisite portrait, think only of Mrs. Crewe in the full bloom of her charm and beauty—the woman who fascinated Richard Brinsley Sheridan and reigned supreme in the heart of Charles James Fox.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE "TWIN WIVES"

WILLIAM HAYLEY, the friend and biographer of Cowper, in his learned and most entertaining *Essay on Old Maids*, has shown us what a wealth of romance is often hidden in the lives of women who—

Grow, live and die in single blessedness.

There are old maids *and* old maids. The popular idea of the class is the sour, unattractive spinster, who has "withered on the virgin thorn" because men have passed her by with contempt or aversion. Like many other popular ideas this is a fallacy, and most of us, I imagine, have met old maids who were so sweet and charming that we have marvelled how the men of their generation could have been so blind or stupid as not to have perceived what perfect wives they would have made.

And yet it may be that they are better as old maids than they would ever have been as wives. Matrimony might have spoiled them; for, the very qualities which make them so delightful as spinsters are those which might not have stood the wear and tear of



*From an engraving.*

AGNES AND MARY BERRY.



married life. To how many women has wedlock proved the tomb of love and romance, of hope and joy! And it is possible that these dear old maids would never have retained their sweetness and charm had their eyes been opened and their tempers tried by the disillusionments of marriage.

Old maids of this sort, however, have usually had one or more love-episodes in their lives, the remembrance of which, so far from souring them with disappointment, has sweetened and brightened their whole existence—they have cherished the dead rose-leaves of their love, and the fragrance of the faded flower lingers with them to the end.

And of all the old maids since the world began there can, I think, have been few more beautiful and attractive than Mary and Agnes Berry, the two sisters who lived together in tranquil happiness for more than fourscore years, who gathered round them all that was best and brightest in society, who numbered among their admirers the wisest, the wittiest, the handsomest men of their time, and whose special distinction it is to have shown the world that the gay cynic, Horace Walpole, possessed a heart.

Certainly the world generally did not credit him with such a possession. Macaulay says that the only friend Horace Walpole had to whom he was sincerely attached was Marshal Conway: he ignores the attachment to the sisters Berry; yet it is impossible to read Walpole's letters to Mary and Agnes Berry without

admitting the sincerity and tenderness of his affection for them.

They were the daughters of Robert Berry, who in 1762 married his distant cousin, Miss Seton. Mary was born at Kirkbridge, in Yorkshire, on March 16th, 1763,—Agnes on May 29th, 1764. Their mother died in childbed in 1767, at the early age of twenty-three.

“Of my mother,” writes Mary in her journal, “I have only the idea of having seen a tall, thin young woman in a pea-green gown, seated in a chair seeming unwell, from whom I was sent away to play elsewhere.”

The two orphan girls were taken in charge by their grandmother, Mrs. Seton, with whom they lived at Askham, in Yorkshire, till they were sent to Chiswick College House to be educated. The governess to whom they were subsequently entrusted married, and from that time the girls were practically self-educated.

“I was then,” writes Mary, “only twelve years old, my sister only eleven. My extreme precocity, both mental and physical, helped to lead my father to suppose that the expense of another governess might be spared, and we were thus left, almost children, to our own devices—to be as idle as we liked, and to read what books, and choose what other employments we pleased. With me it led to much serious evil; with Agnes, to obliging her in later life to acquire such knowledge as she should have had given her

without pains in early youth. To neither of us had the least religious education been at all thought of. It was in the middle of the age of Voltaire, and his doctrines and his wit had been adopted by all the *soi-disant* Scotch wits. My dear grandmother, indeed, aware of this neglect, made me read the Psalms and chapters to her every morning; but as neither explanation nor comment was made upon them, nor was their history followed up in any way, I hated the duty and escaped it when I could. The same consequence took place by the same dear parent making me read every Sunday to her a Saturday paper in the *Spectator*, which, till the middle of life, prevented my ever looking at those exquisite essays or being aware of the beauties of the volumes they were in."

That experience of Mary Berry's will find a host of sympathisers among the victims of our present exasperating system of education, which hammers all the beauty out of the most exquisite English Classics, by turning them into school exercises, to be ever after viewed with loathing by the unhappy creatures forced to analyse and parse them. Surely the man who invented such a system must have been

One that would peep and botanise  
Upon his mother's grave.

In 1781 Robert Berry's uncle Ferguson, a wealthy merchant of Broad Street, Austin Friars, in whose office Robert was employed as a clerk at a salary of

£300 a year, died leaving the bulk of his fortune, £300,000 in the Funds, and a large estate in Scotland, to Robert's younger brother William, and only a legacy of £10,000 to his eldest son, who had incurred his displeasure by marrying a portionless wife that had borne him only daughters. The fortunate legatee, however, settled an annuity of £1,000 on his elder brother, who started, two years later, with his daughters on a tour of the Continent. Robert Berry was a happy-go-lucky, shiftless, indolent creature, with the tastes of a *dilettante*, and Mary Berry thus records in her journal her discovery of his true character and her own responsibilities :

“ At Florence was our first stop ; and here for the first time I began to feel my situation, and how utterly dependent I was on my own resources for my conduct, respectability, and success. My father, with the old inherent easiness of his character, had since my mother's death entirely abandoned the world and all his early acquaintance in it, entirely forgetting that on him now depended the success and the happiness of his two motherless daughters. I soon found that I had to lead those who ought to have led me ; that I must be a protecting mother, instead of a gay companion, to my sister ; and to my father a guide and monitor, instead of finding in him a tutor and protector. Strongly impressed as I was that honour, truth, and virtue were the only roads to happiness, and that the love and consideration of my fellow-creatures,

and the society in which I was about to live, depended entirely on my own conduct and exertions, the whole powers of my mind were devoted to doing always what I thought right and knew would be *safe*, without a consideration of what I knew would be agreeable, while I had at the same time the most lively sense of everything that was brilliant and distinguished, and the greatest desire to distinguish myself. Add to this the most painfully quick feelings, and a necessity for the support of some kind, sympathising mind, and it is easy to imagine, not only how little I could profit by all the advantages nature had given me, but how little I could have enjoyed of the thoughtless gaiety and light-heartedness of youth."

They did not return to England till 1785, after an absence of two years. The next notable event in the lives of the two sisters happened three years later, in 1788, when they met, at the house of Lady Herries, the wife of the St. James's Street banker, Horace Walpole, then in his seventy-first year and one of the best known Englishmen in Europe. In a letter to the Countess of Ossory he thus describes the meeting which led to the tenderest and truest friendship of his life :

"If I have picked up no recent anecdotes on our Common, I have made a much more, to me, precious acquisition. It is the acquaintance of two young ladies of the name of Berry, whom I first saw last winter and who accidentally took a house here, with



their father, for the season. Mr. Berry has since carried his daughters for two or three years to France and Italy, and they are returned the best informed and the most perfect creatures I ever saw at their age. They are exceedingly sensible, entirely natural and unaffected, frank, and, being qualified to talk on any subject, nothing is so easy and agreeable as their conversation—nor more apposite than their answers and observations. The eldest, I discovered by chance, understands Latin and is a perfect Frenchwoman in her conversation. The younger draws charmingly and has copied admirably Lady Di's gipsies, which I lent, though for the first time of her attempting colours. They are of pleasing figures; Mary, the eldest, sweet, with fine dark eyes that are very lively when she speaks, with a symmetry of face that is the more interesting from being pale; Agnes, the younger, has an agreeable, sensible countenance, hardly to be called handsome, but almost. She is less animated than Mary, but seems, out of deference to her sister, to speak seldomer, for they dote on each other, and Mary is always praising her sister's talents. I must even tell you they dress within the bounds of fashion, though fashionably; but without the excrescences and balconies with which modern hoydens overwhelm and barricade their persons. In short, good sense, information, simplicity, and ease characterise the Berrys; and this is not particularly mine, who am apt to be prejudiced, but the universal

voice of all who know them. The first night I met them I would not be acquainted with them, having heard so much in their praise that I concluded they would be all pretension. The second time, in a very small company, I sat next to Mary, and found her an angel both inside and out. Now I do not know which I like best, except Mary's face, which is formed for a sentimental novel, but is ten times fitter for a fifty times better thing, genteel comedy. This delightful family comes to me almost every Sunday evening, as our region is too *proclamatory* to play at cards on the seventh day. I do not care a straw for cards, but I do disapprove of this partiality to the youngest child of the week ; while the other poor six days are treated as if they had no souls to save. I forgot to tell you that Mr. Berry is a little merry man with a round face, and you would not suspect him of so much feeling and attachment. I make no excuses for such minute details ; for if your ladyship insists on hearing the humours of my district, you must for once indulge me with sending you two pearls that I found in my path."

From that moment the fastidious man of the world, the polished cynic, the "Prince of Letter-writers," was devoted to these two charming women, his "twin-wives" as he fondly called them. It was solely for their amusement that he wrote his "Reminiscences of the Courts of George I. and II.," for them he compiled his "Catalogue of Strawberry House," and

to them he indited some of the most delightful of his letters. It was the one deep, sincere, unselfish attachment of his life. Here is his first letter addressed to the sisters some six months after their acquaintance began :

*"February 2nd (1789).*

"I am sorry in the sense of that word before it meant, like a Hebrew word, glad or sorry, that I am engaged this evening ; and I am at your command on Tuesday, as it is always my inclination to be. It is a misfortune that words are become so much the current coin of society, that like King William's shillings, they have no impression left ; they are so smooth, that they mark no more to whom they first belonged than to whom they do belong, and are not worth even the twelpence into which they may be changed ; but if they mean too little, they may seem to mean too much too, especially when an old man (who is often synonymous for a miser) parts with them. I am afraid of protesting how much I delight in your society, lest I should seem to affect being gallant ; but if two negatives make an affirmative, why may not two ridicules compose one piece of sense ? and therefore, as I am in love with you both, I trust it is proof of the good sense of your devoted,

"H. WALPOLE."

How rapidly the intimacy increased, and how warmly the sisters reciprocated the feelings of their

septuagenarian admirer, will be gathered from the following letter of his, five months later :

"STRAWBERRY HILL, *August 13th*, 1789.

"I have received at once most kind letters from you both ; too kind, for you both talk of gratitude. Mercy on me ! Which is the obliged, and which is the gainer ? Two charming beings, whom everybody likes and approves, and who yet can be pleased with the company and conversation and old stories of a Methusalem ? or I, who at the end of my days have fallen into more agreeable society than ever I knew at any period of my life ? I will say nothing of y<sup>r</sup> persons, sense, or accomplishments ; but where, united with all those, could I find so much simplicity, void of pretensions and affectation ? This from any other man would sound like compliment and flattery : but in me, who have appointed myself your guardian, it is a duty to tell you of y<sup>r</sup> merits, that you may preserve and persevere in them. If ever I descry any faults, I well tell you as freely of them. Be just what you are, and you may dare my reproofs. I will restrain even reproaches, tho' in jest, if it puts my sweet Agnes to the trouble of writing when she does not care for it. It is the extreme equality of my affection for both that makes me jealous if I do not receive equal tokens of friendship from both ; and though nothing is more just than the observation of two sisters repeating the same ideas, yet never was

that remark so ill-applied. Tho' y<sup>r</sup> minds are so congenial, I have long observed how originally each of you expresses her thoughts. I could repeat to you expressions of both, which I remember as distinctly as if I had only known either of you. For the future there shall be perfect liberty amongst us. Either of you shall write when she pleases ; while my letters are inseparably meant for both, though the direction may contain but one name, lest the postman should not comprehend a double address."

By this time Horace had become so infatuated in his devotion to his "twin-wives,"—had grown, to use his own expression, such "an old fondle-wife"—that he was for ever sounding their praises abroad, careless of what the world might say or think of the nature of his regard for them. He writes to Lady Ossory :

"I am indeed much obliged for the transcript of the letter on my 'Wives.' Miss Agnes has a finesse in her eyes and countenance that does not propose itself to you, but is very engaging on observation, and has often made herself preferred to her sister, who has the most exactly fine features, and only wants colour to make her face as perfect as her graceful person ; indeed neither has good health nor the air of it. Miss Mary's eyes are grave, but she is not so herself ; and having much more application than her sister, she converses readily, and with great intelligence on all subjects. Agnes is more reserved, but her compact sense very striking, and always to the

purpose. In short, they are extraordinary beings, and I am proud of my partiality for them ; and since the ridicule can only fall on me, and not on them, I care not a straw for its being said that I am in love with one of them—people shall choose which ; it is as much with both as either, and I am infinitely too old to regard the *qu'en dit-on*."

The playful fiction of marriage was kept up on both sides. In reply to a letter from Walpole, enclosed with Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, which he designates "the most delicious poem on earth," Mary writes :

"SOMERSET STREET, *Wednesday Morning*.

"A thousand thanks for the *Botanic Garden*. The first thirty lines, which I have just read, are delicious, and make me quite anxious to go on ; for I must at last own with blushes, what I have hitherto concealed, perhaps improperly, from my husband, but as I am married, it must at last come out, that I was early initiated into all the amorous and loose manners of the plants by that very guilty character, Dr. Solander, and passed too much time in the society and observance of some of the most abandoned vegetable coquettes.

"I hope my having long entirely forsaken all such odd company and lived a very regular life, will in some degree apologise to you for my having been early led astray. We rejoice in the hopes of seeing you to-morrow evening.

"M. BERRY."

As time went on Walpole's affection for his "twin-wives" increased. He seemed to be never happy unless he was either in their society or writing to them. When they were parted, his letters—long ones, too—poured in at the rate of two or three in a week. And how the two sisters must have enjoyed them, and laughed over such passages as the following :

"I passed so many evenings of the last fortnight with you, that I almost preferred it to our two honeymoons, and consequently am the more sensible of the deprivation ; and how dismal was *Sunday* evening, compared to those of last autumn ! If you both felt as I do, we might surpass *any* event in the annals of Dunmow. Oh ! what a prodigy it would be if a husband and *two* wives should present themselves, and demand the fitch of bacon, on swearing that not one of the three in a year and a day wished to be unmarried ! For my part, I know that my affection has done nothing but increase ; though, were there but one of you, I should be ashamed of being so strongly attached at my age ; being in love with both, I glory in my passion, and think it a proof of my sense. Why should not two affirmatives make a negative, as well as the reverse ? and then a double love will be wisdom—for what is wisdom in reality but a negative ? It exists but by correcting folly, and when it has peevishly prevailed on us to abstain from something we have a mind to, it gives itself airs, and in action, pretends to be a personage, a nonentity sets up for a

figure of importance ! It is the case of most of those phantoms, called virtues, which, by smothering poor vices, claim a reward as thief-takers. Do you know I have a partiality for drunkenness, though I never practised it ; it is a reality, but what is sobriety, only the absence of drunkenness. However, *mes chères femmes*, I make a difference between women and men, and do not extend my doctrine to your sex. Everything is excusable in us, and nothing in you. And pray remember that I will not lose my flitch of bacon, though."

It was at the close of this year that Horace Walpole thus inscribed his Catalogue of Strawberry Hill to the Miss Berrys :

To the dear sisters  
MARY and AGNES BERRY,  
this description  
of  
his villa at Strawberry Hill,  
which they often made delightful  
by their company, conversation, and talents,  
is offered  
by  
HORACE WALPOLE,  
from a heart overflowing with  
admiration, esteem, and friendship,  
hoping  
that long after he shall be no more  
it may, while amusing them,  
recall some kind thoughts  
of a most devoted  
and affectionate humble servant.

*December, 1789.*

In the autumn of the following year, 1790, Robert



Berry again took his daughters abroad, and the disconsolate Horace almost resented their leaving him as an act of cruel desertion. There is something genuinely pathetic in the expression of his feelings of grief and loneliness.

“*Sunday, October 10th, 1790,*  
the day of yr departure.

“Is it possible to write to my beloved friends, and refrain from speaking of my grief for losing you, though it is but the continuation of what I have felt ever since I was stunned by your intention of going abroad this autumn? Still I will not tire you with it often. In happy days I smiled and called you *my dear wives*—now I can only think of you as *darling children*, of whom I am bereaved! As such I have loved, and do love you; and charming as you both are, I have had no occasion to remind myself that I am past seventy-three. Your hearts, your understandings, your virtues, and the cruel injustice of your fate, have interested me in everything that concerns you; and, so far from having occasion to blush for any unbecoming weakness, I am proud of my affection for you, and very proud of your condescending to pass so many hours with a very old man, when everybody admires you, and the most insensible allow that your good sense and information (I speak of both) have formed you to converse with the most intelligent of our sex as well as your own; and neither can tax you with airs of pretension or

affectation. Your simplicity and natural ease set off all your other merits—all these graces are lost to me, <sup>^</sup>alas! when I have no time to lose!"

It is touching, that wail of the lonely old worldling who feels himself losing his hold on life just as his heart was being softened and purified by the truest affection he had ever known. And there were other causes, too, for depression. It was a mad thing of Robert Berry to select such a time for travelling through France with his daughters—a time when the whole nation was seething with revolution, and the grim shadow of the Reign of Terror was already projecting its ghastly adumbration. No wonder that Walpole was racked with fears and anxieties for the safety of the two women whom he loved so dearly, and hardly knew a moment's peace of mind whilst they were abroad amongst such turbulent scenes. He had prevailed upon them at last to accept from him as their residence Little Strawberry Hill, previously known as Cliveden from its late owner, the lively and charming Kitty Clive. But unfortunately this arrangement led to the first unpleasantness that ever marred their friendship. Lady Theresa Lewis, to whom Miss Berry entrusted the posthumous publication of her letters, thus narrates the incident:

"Mr. Walpole's (now Lord Orford) anxious wish for the return of his friends, and for their establishment at Cliveden, appears to have been made the subject of some offensive observations in a newspaper.

The anonymous writer evidently inflicted much pain by this unprovoked attack on those whose lives and actions were as strictly private as they were blameless ; and the correspondence to which these paragraphs gave rise, is touching proof of the deep and delicate affection entertained by Lord Orford for his young friends, and of the high-spirited indignation with which Miss Berry repudiated, for herself and family, such unworthy or interested motives as had apparently been attributed to their friendship for one to whom every grateful attention on their part was due."

#### FROM LORD ORFORD

" You have hurt me excessively ! We had passed a most agreeable evening, and then you poisoned all by one cruel word. I see you are too proud to be obliged to me, though you see that my greatest, and the only pleasure I have left, is to make you and y<sup>r</sup> sister a little happier if I can ; and now, when it is a little more in my power, you cross me *in trifles even*, that would compensate me for the troubles that are fallen on me. I thought that my age would allow me to have a friendship that consisted in nothing but distinguishing merit—you allow the vilest of tribunals, the newspapers, to decide how short a way friendship may go ! Where is your good sense in this conduct ? and will you punish me, because what you nor no mortal being can prevent,

a low anonymous scribbler takes a liberty with y<sup>r</sup> name. I cannot help repeating that you have hurt me ! ”

FROM MISS BERRY

*“Friday night, October 12th.*

“I did not like to show you, nor did I myself feel while with you, *how* much I was hurt by the newspaper. To be long honoured with your friendship and remain unnoticed, I knew was impossible, and laid my account with ; but to have it imagined, implied, or even hinted that the purest friendship that ever actuated human bosoms should have any possible foundation in, or view to interested motives ; and that we, whose hereditary neglect of fortune has deprived us of what might, and ought to have been our own, that we should ever afterwards be supposed to have it in view, or be described in a situation, which must mislead the world both as to our sentiments and our conduct, while our principles they cannot know, and if they could, would not enter into—all this I confess I cannot bear ; not even your society can make up to me for it.

“Would to God we had remained abroad, where we might still have enjoyed as much of your confidence and friendship, as ignorance and impertinence seem likely to allow us here.

“Even Cliveden, which, sensible as I am to the compliment of settling us near you, I declare I consider

as our least obligation to you, if it is always to be foremost in the eyes of the world, and considered as the cause of our affection for, and attentions to you. If our seeking your society is supposed by those ignorant of its value, to be with some view beyond its enjoyment, and our situation represented as one, which will aid the belief of this to a mean and interested world, I shall think we have perpetual reason to regret the only circumstance in our lives that could be called fortunate. Excuse the manner in which I write, and in which I feel. My sentiments on newspaper notice have long been known to you, with regard to all who have not so honourably distinguished themselves as to feel above such feeble but venomous shafts.

“Do not plague yourself by answering this. The only consolation I can have is in the knowledge of your sentiments, of which I need no conviction. I am relieved by writing, and shall sleep the sounder for having thus unburdened my heart. Good-night.”

FROM LORD ORFORD.

*“October 13th, 1791.”*

“MY DEAREST ANGEL,

“I had two persons talking law to me, and was forced to give an immediate answer, so that I could not even read y<sup>r</sup> letter till I had done—and now I do read it, it breaks my heart! If my most pure affection has brought mortification and grief on

you, I shall be the most miserable of men. My nephew's death has already brought a load upon me that I have not strength to bear, as I seriously told General Conway this morning. Vexation and fatigue have brought back the eruption in my arm, and I have been half-an-hour under Mr. Watson's hands since breakfast ; my flying gout has fallen into my foot ; I shall want but your uneasiness to finish me. You know I scarce wish to live but to carry you to Cliveden ! But I talk of myself when I should speak to your mind. Is all your felicity to be in the power of a newspaper ? who is not so ? Are your virtue and purity, and my innocence about you ; are our consciences no shield against anonymous folly or envy ? Would you only condescend to be my friend if I were a beggar ? The Duchess of Gloucester when she heard my intention about Cliveden, came and commended me much for doing some little justice to injured merit. For your own sake, for poor injured mine, combat such extravagant delicacy, and do not poison the few days of life which you, and *you* only can sweeten. I am too exhausted to write more ; but let y<sup>r</sup> heart and y<sup>r</sup> strong understanding remove such chimeras. How could you say you wish you had not returned !

"TO MISS MARY BERRY."

"I am in the utmost anxiety to know how you do. I dread lest what I meant kindly should have made you ill. I saw the struggle of both y<sup>r</sup> noble minds

in submitting to oblige me, and therefore all the obligation is on my side. You both have made the greatest sacrifices to me ; I have made none to you—on the contrary, I relieve my own mind whenever I think I can ward off any future difficulty from you, though not a ten-thousandth part of what I would do, were it in my power. All I can say is, that you must know by your own minds how happy you have made mine, and sure you will not regret bestowing happiness on one so attached to you, and attached so reasonably ; for where could I have made so just a choice, or found two such friends ? What did I not feel for both ! Your tears and Agnes' agitation, divided between the same nobleness, and her misery for your sufferings, which is ever awake, would attach me more to both, if that were possible. Dearest souls, do not regret obliging one so devoted to you—it is the only sincere satisfaction I have left ; and be assured that till to-day, I have, though I said nothing, had nothing but anxiety since y<sup>r</sup> father's illness, so impatient I have been for what I received but yesterday. Adieu ! ”

It has been often stated, on the authority of Lord Lansdowne, that when Horace Walpole succeeded to the Earldom of Orford by the death of his nephew in 1791, he averred that the only value of the title in his eyes was that it enabled him to place a coronet within the reach of Mary Berry, and that, indeed, he was ready to go through the formal ceremony of

marriage with either sister to make sure of their society and confer rank and fortune on the family, as he had power to charge the Orford estates with a jointure of £2,000 a year.

That Mary Berry was aware of these statements is certain from the following passage in a letter to a friend :

"Although I have no doubt that Lord Orford said to Lady D., every word that she repeated to your brother—for last winter, at the time the C.'s talked about the matter, he went about saying all this, and more, to everybody that would hear him—but I always thought it rather to frighten and punish them than seriously wishing it himself. And why should he? when, without the ridicule or the trouble of a marriage, he enjoys almost as much of my society, and every comfort from it, that he could in the nearest connection? As the willing offering of a grateful and affectionate heart, the time and attentions I bestow upon him have hitherto given me pleasure. Were they to become a duty, and a duty to which the world would attribute interested motives, they would become irksome. Of the world, its meanness, its total indifference to everything but interest, in some shape or other, be assured you cannot think so badly nor so truly as I do. They best believe who have felt it most."

In Lord Orford's letter to the Miss Berrys, dated September 17th, he thus affectionately alludes to the great



addition to his happiness produced by his friendship with them, and also of his motives for allowing some to think he had other views at heart towards them :

“I have been threescore years and ten looking for a society that I perfectly like, and at last there dropped out of the clouds into Lady Herries’ room two young gentlewomen, whom I so little thought were sent thither on purpose for me, that when I was told they were the charming Miss Berrys I would not go even to the side of the chamber where they sat. But as Fortune never throws anything at one’s head without hitting one, I soon found that the charming Berrys were precisely *ce qu’il me falloit*, and that though young enough to be my great-granddaughters, lovely enough to turn the heads of all our youths, and sensible enough, if said youths have any brains, to set all their heads to rights again—yes, sweet damsels, I have found that you can bear to pass half your time with an antediluvian without discovering any ennui or disgust, tho’ his greatest merit towards you is that he is not one of those old fools who fancy they are in love in their dotage. I have no such vagary, tho’ I am not sorry that some folks think I am so absurd, since it frets their selfishness.”

But, fortunately for all parties concerned, Lord Orford never did seriously propose marriage to either sister and thereby spared both himself and them the pain of a refusal.

Forty years later the question of the relationship

between Lord Orford and the Misses Berry cropped up again, and Charles Greville has the following entry in his diary on the subject :

"On Sunday I went to Richmond to call on Miss Berry, and found her in great indignation at Croker's recent article in the *Quarterly*, upon the series just published of Lord Orford's letters to Mann, angry on his account and on her own. Croker says, what has often been reported, that Lord Orford offered to marry Mary Berry, and on her refusal, to marry Agnes. She says it is altogether false. He never thought of marrying Agnes, and what passed with regard to herself was this : The Duchess of Gloucester was very jealous of his intimacy with the Berrys, though she treated them with civility. At last her natural impetuosity broke out, and she said to him : 'Do you mean to marry Miss Berry, or do you not ?' To which he replied : 'That is as Miss Berry pleases ;' and that, as I understood her, is all that passed about it. She said that nothing could be more beautiful and touching than his affection for her, devoid as it was of any particle of sensual feeling, and she should ever feel proud of having inspired such a man with such a sentiment."

Mary Berry, however, had not been without declared lovers. Her first love-affair had happened when she was a girl of sixteen, and is thus briefly referred to in her journal : "1779. I became acquainted with Mr. Bowman. Suffered as people do at sixteen from

a passion, which, wisely disapproved of, I resisted and dropped." Beyond that curt statement of her own, nothing whatever is known of Mr. Bowman and his suit.

But the deepest and most serious passion of her life was for General O'Hara. She first met him whilst she was travelling with her father and sister in Italy in 1784. The acquaintance then made ripened into intimacy and they appear to have met constantly for several years without any indication of a warmer feeling than friendship on either side. Whilst the Berrys were abroad in 1791, Horace Walpole now and then referred to the General in his letters. "O'Hara," he writes on one occasion, "is come up to town and you will love him better than ever." And again, "I have seen O'Hara with his face as ruddy, his hair as black, and his teeth as white as ever, and as fond of the two as anybody—but I." In 1795 General O'Hara was appointed Governor of Gibraltar: before leaving England to take up his command he asked Mary Berry to be his wife, and she consented. "She loved him," says her biographer, Lady Theresa Lewis, "with that warm and generous enthusiasm that invests its object with every human quality deemed necessary to perfection, and to the latest years of her life she firmly believed that her union with him would have given increased elevation to her own character, would have called forth the best feelings of her own heart, and secured her happiness in this world."



[ From an engraving by W. Greatbach, after a design by]  
Anne Seymour Damer.]

MARY BERRY.



The General naturally wished to carry off his charming bride at once to Gibraltar. But she hesitated. She did not like to leave her father and sister so abruptly, she said. But, there can be little doubt that her real reason was a reluctance to cause pain to her devoted old friend, Lord Orford, who was now fast breaking up and to whom the shock of losing her for ever would have been fatal. This reason she probably did not disclose to O'Hara, who could not understand her motives for delaying their marriage. A quarrel ensued. The engagement was broken off in the following April; and they never met again, for he died before the expiration of his command. "After a twelvemonth," she writes, towards the close of the year, "passed in the most painful, agitating, and unavoidable suspense, I find myself not only totally disappointed in a plan of happiness, founded on the most moderate desires, and pursued by the most rational means, but obliged to change my opinion of one of the characters in the world of which I have ever thought the highest."

When, however, some ill-judging friends sought to alleviate her regret by depreciating what she had lost she indignantly turned upon them :

"Mrs. L., you say, 'observes that my affections have been more deeply engaged than I was aware of,' and Mrs. D. 'has repeatedly intimated the same' to you. Needed you any intimation that my affections *must* have been *deeply* engaged before I

resolved, or even thought of marrying? Had I ever chosen to think of making what is called a *prudent* marriage, did you suppose that I, in common with all my sex, might not have done it? Or could you suppose this a *prudent* marriage? Did my silence on the subject deceive you? and did you really believe me capable of the platitude of talking in raptures, and enlarging on the character and perfections of the man whom I considered my husband? Now that he no longer stands in that position, it is not *my* having reason to complain of him that shall prevent my doing him justice. I know not where you have taken your reports of his character, but I know that a character 'universally highly thought of,' is the last I should choose for any intimate connection, for (except in early youth) nothing but mediocrity can possibly attain it. . . . Instead of not knowing 'any real virtues he possesses,' until this unfortunate affair, in which I am still convinced his head and not his heart is to blame, I know nobody whose character united so many manly virtues."

She sealed up her own and the General's letters, and laid them aside for forty-two years. She then re-opened the packet, and enclosed in it what the editor, Lady Theresa Lewis, truly describes as "the touching little record of the disappointed hopes and blighted affection that deepened the natural vein of sadness in her character."

"This parcel of letters relates to the six happiest

months of my long and insignificant existence, although these six months were accompanied by fatiguing and unavoidable uncertainty, and by the absence of everything that could constitute present enjoyment. But I looked forward to a future existence which I felt, for the first time, would have called out all the powers of my mind and all the warmest feelings of my heart, and should have been supported by one who, but for the cruel absence which separated us, would never have for a moment doubted that we should have materially contributed to each other's happiness. These prospects served even to pass cheerfully a long winter of delays and uncertainty, by keeping my mind firmly riveted on their accomplishment. A concatenation of unfortunate circumstances—the political state of Europe making absence a necessity, and even frequent communication impossible, letters lost and delayed, all certainty of meeting more difficult, questions unanswered, doubts unsatisfied. All these circumstances, combined in the most unlucky manner, crushed the fair fabric of my happiness, not at one fell shock, but by the slow mining misery of loss of confidence, of unmerited complaints, of finding by degrees misunderstandings, and the firm rock of mutual confidence crumbling under my feet, while my bosom for long could not banish a hope that all might yet be set right. And so it would, had we ever met for twenty-four hours. But he remained at his government at Gibraltar in 1802. And I, forty-



two years afterwards, on opening these papers which had been sealed up ever since, receive the conviction that some feelings in some minds are indelible."

And yet it is difficult to believe that Mary would have found O'Hara all that her fancy painted him, if the following sketch of that gallant officer by Captain Thomas Hamilton ("Cyril Thornton") be an accurate delineation of his character :

"It is impossible for me to recur to the period of my sojourn in Gibraltar, and yet say nothing of the governor, General O'Hara. His appearance, indeed, was of that striking cast which, when once seen, is not easily forgotten. General O'Hara was the most perfect specimen I ever saw of the soldier and courtier of the last age, and in his youth had fought with Granby and Ligonier. One could have sworn to it by his air and look—nay, the very cut of his coat—the double row of sausage-curls that projected on either flank of his toupee—or the fashion of the huge military boots, which rivalled in size, but far outshone in lustre, those of a Dutch fisherman, or French postilion. Never had he changed for a more modern covering the Kevenhuller hat which had been the fashion of his youth. There it was, in shape precisely that of an equilateral triangle, placed with mathematical precision on his head, somewhat elevated behind, and sloping in an unvarying angle downwards to the eyes, surmounted by a long, stiff feather rising from a large rosette of black riband on

the dexter side. This was the last of the Kevenhullers ; it died, and was buried with the governor, for no specimen has since been discovered, and the Kevenhuller hat, like the mammoth and the mastodon, has become extinct for ever.

"Notwithstanding the strictness of the discipline which he scrupulously enforced in the garrison which he commanded, no officer could be more universally popular than General O'Hara. In person he had been—and, though somewhat bent by years, even then was—remarkably handsome. His life had been divided between the camp and the court, and he had been distinguished in both. He was a bachelor, and had always been noted as a gay man ; too gay a man, perhaps, to have ever thought of narrowing his liberty by the imposition of the trammels of wedlock. General O'Hara had always moved in the very highest circles of society at home ; and, notwithstanding an office of considerable emolument which, I believe, he held in the Royal Household, had dissipated his private fortune, and become deeply involved in his circumstances. It was this cause alone which had induced him, late in life, to submit to the banishment—peculiarly disagreeable to a man of his habits—attached to the acceptance of the chief command at Gibraltar. The General was a *bon vivant*, an unrivalled boon companion, to whom society was as necessary as the air he breathed."

Now, it is true that this portrait was drawn after

the General's engagement with Miss Berry had been broken off, and the disappointment may have imparted a dash of recklessness to his character. Still I cannot bring myself to believe that Horace Walpole's "Suavissima Maria" would have found her ideal husband in that gay, jovial, free-living soldier.

Meanwhile, as I have said, my Lord Orford was fast breaking up. It is pitiful to find him writing thus from Strawberry Hill on July 20th, 1796 :

"It is almost ridiculous for me to attempt to write with my own hand ; my fingers are so maimed they stumble at every long word ; my attention dozes, and I have no more imagination left than if I were forcing myself to write a new novel in five volumes. In short my decay is so sensible to me, that I will not deceive myself nor expect any further recovery, no change will turn me quite round, I must only take care not to let it expose me."

His last letter to his "twin-wives" was dated December 15th of that year :

"Very soon after the date of this letter," writes Miss Berry, "the gout, the attacks of which were every day becoming more frequent and longer, made those with whom Lord Orford had been living at Strawberry Hill very anxious that he should return to Berkeley Square, to be nearer assistance in case of any sudden seizure. As his correspondents, soon after his removal, were likewise established in London, no more letters passed between them. When not im-

mediately suffering from pain, his mind was tranquil and cheerful. He was still capable of being amused and of taking some part in conversation ; but during the last weeks of his life, when fever was superadded to his other ills, his mind became subject to the cruel hallucination of supposing himself neglected, and abandoned by the only persons to whom his memory clung, and whom he always desired to see. In vain they recalled to his recollection how recently they had left him, and how short had been their absence ; it satisfied him for the moment, but the same idea recurred as soon as he had lost sight of them. At last nature, sinking under the exhaustion of weakness, obliterated all ideas but those of mere existence, which ended without a struggle on March 2nd, 1797."

Lord Orford bequeathed the sisters £4,000 each, with the house, furniture, garden and grounds of Little Strawberry Hill, jointly for their lives. He also left them all his unpublished MSS., and the copyrights of his printed works. And so ended this singular and romantic friendship between a fastidious, cynical old worldling, and two young and charming women. It had lasted for nine years, the record of which is preserved in a number of letters as tender, playful, refined, and altogether delightful as anything to be found in the literature of letter-writing. Horace Walpole's is not quite the kind of character for which one can feel much admiration or respect. But I repeat my assertion that I cannot understand how

any one can read his letters to Mary and Agnes Berry without allowing that he had a heart.

A year after Lord Orford's death, there appeared a complete edition of his works in five volumes. This was Mary Berry's tribute to the memory of her dear friend and benefactor, and we may be sure that to her the task was a labour of love.

Both sisters had literary tastes, and their father, in his indolent, *dilettante* way, flirted with the Muses now and then. But Mary alone gave herself seriously to literary work. In 1810, she edited the *Letters of Madame du Deffand to Horace Walpole and Voltaire*, for which she received £200. And some twenty years later she published her *Comparative View of Social Life in England and France*, a clever and thoughtful book, which excited considerable interest at the time, but is now utterly forgotten.

But Miss Berry's most astounding literary venture was a comedy in five acts entitled *Fashionable Friends*. It was originally played in private by amateurs at Strawberry Hill, and was so well received by her friends that she was ill-advised enough to have it produced on the boards of Drury Lane in the May of 1802. It only ran three nights: the public would not have it at any price, not because the comedy was without literary and dramatic merit, but because its morality was so scandalously lax. Mary Berry, though herself one of the most modest and pure-minded of women, had no conception of morals in the

conventional sense. From her childhood she had been at liberty to roam as she pleased amongst all kinds of literature, never troubling her head as to what was right or wrong, from a moral point of view, in the authors whose works she read with a perfectly innocent mind. The intrigues of married and unmarried lovers seemed to her part-and-parcel of the legitimate stock-in-trade of the dramatist, and she made free use of them in her comedy, without the remotest idea that she was violating the rules of propriety. The same innocence, or obtuseness, if you will, led her to include in her edition of Horace Walpole's works his tragedy of *The Mysterious Mother*, the most revolting story of incest ever written or conceived—though, it is true, the horrible secret is only sprung as a surprise upon the reader in the last act, and the first four acts are free from any apparent suggestion of immorality.

The reception awarded to *Fashionable Friends* wounded Mary's sensitive nature to the quick, and she never again ventured to seek the honours of the stage. But it was altogether inexcusable on her part to father the play upon Lord Orford, as she did in an advertisement, declaring that the comedy had been discovered amongst his unpublished papers.

Two years after the mortifying failure of her comedy, Mary Berry had a still greater trial. In her diary for 1804, there occurs this brief entry:—  
"Colonel — engaged to marry Agnes. Engage-

ment broken off in the Spring. Agnes dangerously ill."

The "Colonel" here mysteriously referred to appears to have been her cousin, William Ferguson. He had been strictly cautioned by his family before his visit to London to avoid the Berrys, who were represented as scheming and impecunious adventuresses. He found that the ladies had been grossly slandered and promptly fell in love with Agnes, who returned his affection and accepted his offer of marriage. Why the engagement was broken off I have been unable to discover, but it may be reasonably conjectured that the pronounced hostility of his family to the match was the real cause.

Devotedly attached as Mary was to her sister, one can readily imagine how she shared Agnes's pain and with what anxious solicitude she nursed her dear one during that long and alarming illness.

In 1817 Robert Berry died at Genoa of sheer old age, and with his death his annuity ceased. But Mary and Agnes had a joint income of £700 a year, and on this modest competency they for more than thirty years kept up that little *salon* in Curzon Street which was the resort of all the most brilliant men and women of the day. With the two sisters was associated Lady Charlotte Lindsay, youngest daughter of Lord North, sometime Prime Minister, who resembled her father both in the plainness of her person and in the kindliness and vivacity of her

disposition. Harriet Martineau, a dour, silent, unsympathetic person, recalling the little parties in Curzon Street, writes in her autobiography :

"The ancient ladies themselves, the Miss Berrys and their inseparable friend, Lady Charlotte Lindsay (the youngest daughter of Lord North), whose presence seemed to carry one back almost a century, were the main attraction of those parties. While up to all modern interests, the old-fashioned rouge and pearl-powder, and false hair, and the use of the feminine oaths of a hundred years ago were odd and striking. *E.g.*, a footman tells his mistress that Lady So-and-so begs she will not wait dinner, as she is drying her shoes, which got wet between the carriage and the door. The response is 'O! Christ! if she should catch cold! Tell her she is a dear soul, and we would not have her hurry herself for the world,' etc., etc. My mother heard an exclamation at our door when the carriage door would not open, 'My God! I can't get out!' And so forth continually. But they were all three so cheerful, so full of knowledge and of sympathies for good ideas, and so evidently fit for higher pursuits than the social pleasures amidst which one met them, that, though their parties *were* rather 'blue,' they were exceedingly agreeable."

But indeed it was not only in London that the sisters gathered round them the best society. Wherever they might be their house was a centre of



attraction to men and women who loved pleasant, witty, and intellectual company. Canova, the great Italian sculptor, who met them first in Rome writes : " Sometimes think of me, dear ladies, for I assure you I retain the most lively recollections of your charming manners and the amiable qualities which adorn your noble hearts and console whomsoever approaches you." Lord Minto, after his return from the Governor-Generalship of India, had the good fortune to find them at Genoa, and told Professor Playfair that " but for the Miss Berrys' house and the society they collected there, Genoa would have been insupportable."

Sydney Smith was one of their most devoted friends and admirers. His wit brightened their assemblies when he was present and his inimitable letters enlivened and delighted them when he was absent. Here is a characteristic note of his in reference to an incident which he playfully exaggerated, for he loved quizzing these dear spinsters of Curzon Street.

" COMBE-FLOREY,  
*August 28, 1844.*

" The general notion here is that the two Miss Berrys, in conjunction with Lady Charlotte, have been destroyed by fire at Richmond. I am told that the Hand-in-Hand and the Phoenix fire-engines played upon them for a considerable time without the smallest effect ; that they were so brilliant, and emitted so many sparks, and showed themselves to

be composed of materials so combustible, that it was impossible to save them ; that the elder Miss Berry (Elder Berry) was heard in her last sufferings inviting a party to dinner after the fire. Lady Charlotte, with her glass, eyed to the last moment the fire people who were playing upon her ; and Agnes screamed out to a policeman to write to the housekeeper in Curzon Street to inform her that they were all burnt alive."

Mary Berry's letters, too, seem to have been as sympathetic as her talk. Lord Jeffrey found them a solace in his despondent moods and in acknowledging one of them, writes : "I am grateful for the pleasure your letter has given me and the *good it has done me*. . . . Never was wisdom so gentle or magnanimous, so simple and modest."

At Tunbridge Wells the sisters were the "cynosure of neighbouring eyes" ; and Tommy Moore in his diary gives us this glimpse of them at that fashionable watering-place :

"The Pantiles were put into an uproar last Tuesday by the arrival of the Princess of Wales on a visit to the Berrys. She brought Lady C. Campbell, and Mrs. and Miss Rawdon with her, but not a man did she bring, or could she get here for love or money, except Sir Philip Francis, and old Berry, who, egad, liked the fun of gallanting her about, and enjoyed himself more than the fair daughters did, who were in a grand fuss, and were forsaken in their utmost

need by beaux their former suppers fed, and had to amuse H.R.H. as well as they could, with the assistance of a few women, which she did not care about."

And yet Mary had her fits of depression and melancholy. Sometimes she railed at old age and complained bitterly of the cruelty of being allowed to live whilst all the faculties that made life worth living were decaying. It is on such a wail that her old friend Lady Morley thus rallies her :

"DEAREST MISS BERRY,—You have no business to say ill-natured things of old age. It is an evil or a good (like most things) according as we take it ; but it is scarcely an evil to you ; and as I always take you for my model in that matter, it shall not be an evil to me, if, please God, I live for two or three years longer, and have no lingering, painful disease to prevent my enjoying and making the best of it. You are surrounded, almost as you were in your youth, by those who admire and love you with all their hearts and souls. You have a large volume of past events in your memory to interest you at all times ; you have still a cheerful *enjoying* spirit, and above all that blessed hope that, as the world and its pleasures draw to a close, a far, far higher state of enjoyment awaits you. 'Tis for 'crabbed age' to grumble—standing alone like a blasted yew in a churchyard, with nothing around but the graves

of contemporaries—without the sweet compensation of those gentle, kindly, warm feelings, and affections, which attach all who come within their influence, old and young, and make life, if it were to last as long as did that of Methuselah, cheerful and happy. Now is not that the truth? I begin to have a craving to drive up to your door, and to have a merry evening at dear No. 8. . . . God bless you," etc., etc.

There was, indeed, no need for Mary Berry to complain of old age, for few women have so remarkably preserved both their personal attractions and their mental faculties. Charles Greville, who never saw her until she was long past seventy, says : "She must have been exceedingly good-looking, for I can remember her with a fine commanding figure, and a very handsome face full of expression and intelligence. She had been very carefully educated and was full of literary tastes and general information, so that her conversation was always spirited, agreeable, and instructive."

Among the later men of letters who loved and admired the Berrys was Thackeray. Miss Kate Field, in the "Recollections of Thackeray" which she contributed a few years ago to the *Century Magazine*, referring to her first meeting with the author of *Vanity Fair*, says :

"Afterwards we frequently met at the Miss Berrys', where night after night were assembled all the wit and beauty of that time. There was such a charm about

these gatherings of friends that hereafter we may say : 'There is no *salon* now to compare with that of the Miss Berrys in Curzon Street.' My sister and I, with our great admiration and friendship for Mr. Thackeray, used to think that, at first, the Miss Berrys did not thoroughly appreciate or understand him ; but one evening when he had left early they said they had perceived for the first time 'what a very remarkable man he was.' He became a constant and welcome visitor at their house ; they read his works with delight, and whenever they were making up a pleasant dinner, used to say : 'We *must* have Thackeray.' It was at one of these dinners that Miss Berry astonished us all, by saying that she had never read Jane Austen's novels until lately some one had lent them to her. But she could not get on with them ; they were totally uninteresting to her—'long-drawn-out details of very ordinary people'—and she found the books so tedious that she could not understand their having obtained such a celebrity as they had done. 'Thackeray and Balzac,' she added (Thackeray being present), 'write with great minuteness, but do so with a brilliant pen.' Thackeray made two bows of gratitude (one, pointing to the ground, for Balzac)."

Mary Berry was as heterodox in her theatrical as in her literary judgments. She admired neither Kean nor Talma. Of the former she writes :

"*Monday, 28th (March 1814).* I went with Lady Conyngham to the play to see Kean for the first

time. It was *Richard the Third*. It pleased me, but I was not enthusiastic. His expression of the passions is natural and strong, but I do not like his declamation ; his voice, naturally not agreeable, becomes monotonous. When I have seen him in *Hamlet* I shall be better able to judge if he will ever reach what is now expected of him.

"*Thursday, 31st.* Went in the Duke of Devonshire's box to see Kean in *Hamlet*. I must confess I am disappointed in his talent. To my mind he is without grace, and without elevation of mind, because he never seems to rise with the poet in those sublime passages which occur in *Hamlet*, and for what is called recitation of verse he understands nothing."

I can almost fancy, as I read those passages, that I am listening to a criticism of Henry Irving by one of his very lukewarm admirers.

Miss Agnes Berry adored her elder sister ; *she* had considerable clearness and acuteness of perception, and Thackeray always maintained she was the more naturally gifted of the two sisters. In her youth she was a pretty, charming girl, with whom Gustavus Adolphus danced at one of his Court balls, and was admired and envied by the other ladies present.

There were others, besides Thackeray, who held that opinion of Agnes Berry. I cannot help thinking, however, that they were mistaken, and that the secondary part which she always played to her elder sister was the one which Nature really intended for her.

But there were some persons who did not appreciate these two charming women. The Baroness Bunsen, wife of the famous scholar and diplomatist, was one of them. That sweet-tempered, benevolent, great-hearted lady, had some taint of feminine spite in her nature, and could not always be charitable to those of her own sex whom she heard every one around her praising, as the following extract from a letter to her mother witnesses. There had been some concerts given at Rome, in the Spring of 1821, by the Niebuhrs and others, in honour of the two great Prussian statesmen, Baron von Stein and the Prince of Hardenberg.

“The Miss Berrys,” writes the baroness from Rome, “were at the concerts, and each time happened to sit close to me, therefore I had a full opportunity of observing their behaviour and hearing their conversation. In the fine and fashionable dress—the toques, the caps, the satin, the gauze and the blonde in which they are always attired—it is out of my power to recognise the little woman whom we saw one morning at Mrs. W. Lock’s; but I observe the Miss Berry who appears by far the youngest, and is the tallest, with a very good and youthful figure, is the person who has the harsh voice, the dictatorial tone, and the keen black eyes. The other Miss Berry looks much milder, is quieter in her character, and speaks neither so much nor so loud. The first-mentioned attacked Charles [Baron Bunsen] at one of the concerts (for her

speaking to anybody has the appearance of an attack) to ask the very learned question whether Palestrina had not lived *just before* Marcello. Baron Stein mentioned the Miss Berrys to Charles in this manner—‘There is an old woman who goes about Rome with a younger sister of sixty or seventy years of age. She is always talking of Horace Walpole; I have given her to understand that I despise the man, but nothing can keep her quiet on the subject.’ ”

I think that is the only recorded note of dispraise to be found in the published correspondence of any of Mary Berry’s contemporaries, and I leave the reader to take it for what it is worth.

And so the two sisters, more closely knit to one another every year of their lives, glided into a beautiful old age with

that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.

Agnes was the first to go. She died on January 9th, 1852, in her 88th year. “Her death,” writes Mary in her diary, “was most peaceful and without any great previous suffering. . . . I hope I am tolerably prepared to follow dear Agnes at as short a distance as I ever thought I should and of which we have so often talked with mutual satisfaction.”

That distance was indeed to be short, though neither Mary nor any of those who knew her guessed how short. On the 28th of the following June the Queen



expressed an earnest wish to make the personal acquaintance of Miss Berry, then in her 90th year, and they met at Buckingham Palace. "Luckily," writes Mary, "I had strength enough to carry through the interview very agreeably : and was much pleased to find our Sovereign so pleasing and unaffected a person, to say nothing of her extreme graciousness." Mrs. Keeley, the late veteran actress, it will be remembered, had a similar experience of royal condescension in *her* 90th year.

Five months later, on November 21st, Mary Berry followed the sister whom she had so dearly loved, and with whom she had lived in unbroken harmony for eighty-seven years ! Death came to her very gently at midnight, and she passed peacefully and painlessly away. There was no disease. She had her faculties to the last. The machinery was worn out and the machine stopped : that was all.

"With the lives of the sisters," writes their biographer, Lady Theresa Lewis, "closed a society which will ever be remembered by all who frequented those pleasant little gatherings in Curzon Street. Sometimes a note, sometimes a word, and, more often the lamp being lighted over the door, was taken as notice to attend, and, on entering, it might be to find only a few *habitués*, or a larger and more brilliant assembly. All that was uncertain ; but it was certain to find the cordial welcome of the two genial, lively, well-dressed, distinguished-looking hostesses, the comfortable tea-

table, over which their cousin, Miss Anne Turner, presided for years, and Lady Charlotte Lindsay, the third partner in the firm, clever and agreeable to the last. There was an absence of formality—a kindly mingling together of persons of various habits, pursuits and positions in life, that tended to bring different portions of society together, as much as in other coteries there is a tendency to keep them apart; and when death had closed this little chapter in our social life, no one attempted to carry, or, indeed could have carried, it on with equal success: their age, their experience in society, Miss Berry's acknowledged talent, their home-staying life, their absence of domestic duties or family ties, all contributed to give them the power and the means which others have not, to do that which few would have done so well, under equally favourable circumstances."

Of all the literary tributes paid to the two sisters I think the most graceful and touching were the lines written by Lord Houghton (Richard Monckton Milnes) which appeared in *The Times* the day after the funeral of Mary Berry, from which I select the following stanzas:

Within one undisturbed abode  
Their presence seems to dwell,  
From which continual pleasures flowed  
And countless graces fell;  
Where none were sad, and few were dull,  
And each one said his best,  
And beauty was most beautiful  
With vanity at rest.

Brightly the day's discourse rolled on,  
Still casting on the shore  
Memorial pearls of times bygone,  
And worthies now no more ;  
And little tales of long ago  
Took meaning from those lips,  
Wise chroniclers of joy and woe,  
And eyes without eclipse.

No taint or scoff obscured the wit  
That there rejoiced to reign ;  
They never could have laughed at it  
If it had carried pain.  
There, needless scandal, e'en though true,  
Provoked no bitter smile,  
And even men of fashion grew  
Benignant for a while.

Farewell ! the pleasant social page  
Is read, but ye remain  
Examples of ennobled age,  
Long life without a stain ;  
A lesson to be scorned by none,  
Least by the wise and brave,  
Delightful as the winter sun  
That gilds this open grave.

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